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(54) A liquid container having a liquid detecting device

(57) A liquid container (1), including a housing containing therein liquid, a liquid supply opening (2) formed in the housing through which liquid is supplied to the outside of the housing, and a detection device (3) hav-

ing a piezoelectric element and attached on the housing, the detection device detects a consumption degree of level of liquid contained in the housing.

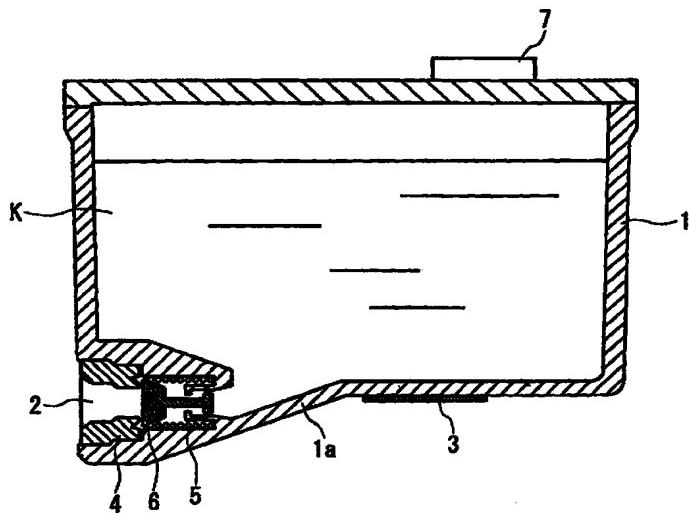


FIG. 1

Description

[0001] This patent application claims priority based on a Japanese patent applications, H. 11-139683 filed on May 20, 1999, H. 11-147538 filed on May 27, 1999 and H. 11-256522 filed on September 10, 1999, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**1. Field of the Invention**

[0002] The present invention relates to a liquid container and a liquid consumption. More particularly, the present invention relates to an ink cartridge to which a piezoelectric device detecting an ink consumption state inside an ink cartridge supplying the liquid to a printing head is mounted and to which a memory means that stores ink consumption data detected by the piezoelectric device is mounted.

2. Description of the Related Art

[0003] In an ink-jet recording apparatus, a carriage thereof is comprised of a pressure generating means which pressurizes a pressure generating chamber and a nozzle opening which discharges the pressurized ink therefrom as ink droplets. The ink-jet recording apparatus is structured such that ink from the ink tank is being supplied to a recording head via a passage, so as to continuously perform a printing operation. The ink tank is structured as a cartridge in a detachable manner so that a user can replace it when ink is consumed out.

[0004] Conventionally, as a method of controlling the ink consumption of the ink cartridge, a method is known of controlling the ink consumption by means of a calculation in which the counted number of ink droplets discharged by the recording head and the amount of ink sucked in a maintenance process of the printing head are integrated by software, and another method of controlling the ink consumption in which the time at which the ink is actually consumed is detected by directly mounting to the ink cartridge the electrodes for use in detecting the liquid surface, and so forth.

[0005] Moreover, in the calculation-based method of controlling the ink consumption by integrating the discharged number of ink droplets and the amount of ink or the like by the software, there is a problem where the ink consumption amount inside the ink cartridge can not be detected. As for the method of controlling by electrodes the time at which the ink is consumed, there remain problems such as limitation to the types of ink and the complicated sealing structure of the electrodes and so on though a structure for detecting the ink consumption may be somehow proposed.

[0006] However, in the calculation-based method of controlling the ink consumption by integrating the discharged number of ink droplets and the amount of ink or the like by the software, there are problems where an error occurs due to a printing mode and so on at a user's side and another unwanted error occurs when the same cartridge is mounted again. Moreover, the pressure inside the ink cartridge and the viscosity of the ink change depending on usage environment such as ambient temperature and humidity, elapsed time after an ink cartridge has been opened for use, and usage frequency at a user side. Thus, a problem is caused where a considerable error occurs between the calculated ink consumption and the actual ink consumption.

[0007] On the other hand, in the method of controlling by electrodes the time at which the ink is consumed, as disclosed for example in the Japanese Patent Application Laid-Open No. Hei8-34123, whether or not the ink is present can be controlled with high reliability since the liquid surface of ink can be actually detected. actual ink consumption can be detected at one point. However, since detecting the liquid surface of ink relies on the ink conductivity, there are problems in that types of ink which can be detected might be limited and a sealing structure of the electrodes becomes complicated. Moreover, since precious metal is usually used as the electrode material, which is highly conductive and erosive, manufacturing costs of the ink cartridge increases thereby. Moreover, since it is necessary to attach the two electrodes to two separate positions of the ink cartridge, the manufacturing process increases, thus causing a problem which increases the manufacturing costs.

[0008] Moreover, when the ink cartridge scans together with the recording head of the ink-jet recording apparatus, there are occasions where undulated waves are caused and bubbles generated. The bubbles may cause erroneous operation in the course of detecting whether or not the ink is present. In particular, in apparatus which directly detects the ink consumption amount using the electrodes to control the point at which the ink is consumed, the erroneous operation due to bubbles are significant.

[0009] There is an occasion where a cavity is provided in an ink detecting portion inside the cartridge, in apparatus which directly detects the ink consumption amount using the electrodes to control the point at which the ink is consumed. That there exists ink in the cavity may cause erroneous detection.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] Therefore, the present invention has been made in view of the foregoing drawbacks and it is an object of the present invention to provide a liquid container capable of reliably detecting a liquid consumption status and dispensing with a complicated sealing structure. It is another object of the present invention to provide an ink cartridge capable of reliably detecting the ink consumption amount and capable of dispensing with a complicated sealing structure. These objects are achieved by combinations described in the independent claims. The dependent claims define further advantageous and exemplary combinations of the present invention.

[0011] The present invention provides a technology of detecting the liquid remaining amount by utilizing vibration in particular, and such a technology is improved. The present invention makes possible suitable utilization of detection result, and improves detection accuracy. Moreover, the present invention is not limited to the ink cartridge and can be applied to detecting the other liquid contained in the liquid container.

[0012] By implementing the liquid container and module according to the present invention, the manufacturing process of the liquid container can be shortened and thus the manufacturing cost therefor can be reduced, and moreover, the consumption amount of the liquid in the liquid container can be continuously detected irrespective of the types of the liquid in use.

[0013] Moreover, it is an object of the present invention to provide a liquid container which detects whether or not a predetermined amount of ink is actually present in the liquid container and which includes a means for detecting whether or not a deficiency is present.

[0014] Moreover, it is another object of the present invention to provide a liquid container which can confirm whether or not it contains a predetermined amount of liquid at the time of as well as after manufacturing the liquid container.

[0015] Moreover, it is still another object of the present invention to provide a liquid container capable of detecting a tilted angle of the liquid container in such a case when the liquid container is not properly mounted.

[0016] Moreover, it is still another object of the present invention to provide a liquid container capable of judging whether or not a means for detecting the liquid consumption state operates normally.

[0017] This summary of the invention does not necessarily describe all necessarily features so that the invention may also be sub-combination of these described features.

30 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**[0018]**

Fig. 1 shows an embodiment of an ink cartridge for use with a single color, for example, the black ink.

Fig. 2 shows an embodiment of the ink cartridge which houses a plural types of inks.

Fig. 3. shows an ink-jet recording apparatus suitable for the ink cartridges shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, according to an embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 4 is a detailed cross sectional view of a sub-tank unit 33.

Fig. 5(I) - 5(V) show manufacturing methods o elastic wave generating means 3, 15, 16 and 17.

Fig. 6 shows another embodiment of the elastic wave generating means 3 shown in Fig. 5.

Fig. 7 shows an ink cartridge according to another embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 8 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 9 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 10 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 11 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 12A and Fig. 12B shows another embodiments of the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 11.

Fig. 13A and Fig. 13B show ink cartridges according to still another embodiment of the present invention.

Figs. 14A, 14B and 14C show plan views of the through hole 1c according to another embodiment.

Figs. 15A and 15B show cross sections of the ink-jet recording apparatus according to still another embodiment of the present invention.

Figs. 16A and 16B show an embodiment of the ink cartridge suitable for the recording apparatus shown in Figs. 15A and 15B.

Fig. 17 shows an ink cartridge 272 according to still another embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 18 shows an ink cartridge 272 and an ink-jet recording apparatus according to still another embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 19 shows still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 272 shown in Fig. 16.

Figs. 20A, 20B and 20C show details of the actuator 106.

Figs. 21A, 21B, 21C, 21D, 21E and 21F show periphery and equivalent circuits of the actuator 106.

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Figs. 22A and 22B show relationship between the ink density and ink resonant frequency detected by the actuator 106.

Figs. 23A and 23B show waveforms of the counter electromotive force of the actuator 106.

Fig. 24 shows another embodiment of the actuator 106.

5 Fig. 25 shows a cross section of a part of the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 24.

Fig. 26 shows a cross section of the entire actuator 106 shown in Fig. 24.

Fig. 27 shows a manufacturing method of the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 24.

Figs. 28A, 28B and 28C show an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention.

Figs. 29A, 29B and 29C show another embodiment of the through hole 1c.

10 Fig. 30 shows an actuator 660 according to another embodiment.

Figs. 31A and 31B show an actuator 670 according to still another embodiment.

Fig. 32 is a perspective view showing a module 100.

Fig. 33 is an exploded view showing the structure of the module 100 shown in Fig. 32.

Fig. 34 shows another embodiment of the module 100.

15 Fig. 35 is an exploded view showing the structure of the module 100 shown in Fig. 34.

Fig. 36 shows still another embodiment of the module 100.

Fig. 37 shows an exemplary cross section of the module 100 shown in fig. 32 where the module 100 is mounted to the ink container.

Figs. 38A, 38B and 38C show still another embodiment of the module 100.

20 Fig. 39 shows an embodiment of the an ink cartridge using the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 20 and Fig. 21 and an ink-jet recording apparatus therefor.

Fig. 40 shows a detail of the ink-jet recoding apparatus.

Figs. 41A and 41B show another embodiments of the ink cartridge 180 shown in Fig. 40.

Figs. 42A, 42B and 42C show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 180.

25 Figs. 43A, 43B and 43C show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 180.

Figs. 44A, 44B, 44C and 44D show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 180.

Figs. 45A, 45B and 45C show another embodiments of the ink cartridge 180 shown in Fig. 44C.

Figs. 46A, 46B, 46C and 46D show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge using the module 100.

30 Fig. 47 shows a cross sectional view of the ink container in the vicinity of a base face thereof at the time when the module 100 shown in Fig. 32 is mounted to the container 1.

Fig. 48 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge according to the present embodiment where the ink cartridge is cut along a longitudinal or vertical direction.

Fig. 49 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge cut in the longitudinal or vertical direction according to another embodiment.

35 Fig. 50 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge according to the present embodiment in the latitudinal direction or cross direction.

Fig. 51 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge when the ink supply port 2 is arranged so as to supply ink K in the vertical position with respect to the liquid surface of ink K.

40 Fig. 52 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge according to another embodiment, where the ink supply port 2 supplies ink K in the vertical direction with respect to the liquid surface of ink K.

Fig. 53 shows an embodiment of an ink cartridge which houses plural types of inks.

Fig. 54 shows a process of detecting the liquid surface in a step-by-step manner according to the present embodiment.

Fig. 55A and Fig. 55B show containers suitable for mounting liquid sensors.

45 Figs. 56A and 56B show a structural example for positioning the supply port.

Fig. 57 illustrates an ink consumption detection using a plurality of liquid sensors provided in the slanted wall.

Fig. 58 shows another example of the structure in which a plurality of liquid sensors are provided in the slanted wall.

Fig. 59 shows still another example of the structure in which a plurality of liquid sensors are provided in the slanted wall.

50 Fig. 60 shows exemplary structure in which the liquid sensor is mounted by using the mounting module.

Fig. 61 shows another exemplary structure in which the liquid sensor is mounted by using the mounting module.

Figs. 62A, 62B and 62C shows various structures of the actuator.

Fig. 63 shows exemplary structure in which the liquid sensor is provided in an ink cartridge of an off-carriage type.

Fig. 64 shows exemplary structure in which the liquid sensor is provided in a sub-tank.

55 Fig. 65 shows a control system of an ink-jet recording apparatus according to the present embodiment.

Fig. 66 shows examples adopting various display modes when indicating the ink consumption state.

Fig. 67 shows another control system of an ink-jet recording apparatus according to another embodiment.

Fig. 68 shows a process of how to switch the detection direction of the liquid position in an ink consuming process

in the system shown in Fig. 66.

Fig. 69 shows a sensor-fail countermeasure process in the system shown in Fig. 66.

Figs. 70A and 70B show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge according to the present invention.

Fig. 71 shows another embodiment of the actuator.

Fig. 72 is an exemplary cross sectional view of the module 100 shown in Fig. 32.

Fig. 73 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge for use with single color ink, for example, black ink, of an embodiment according to the present invention.

Fig. 74 is a cross sectional view for describing the detail of the sub-tank unit.

Figs. 75A, 75B and 75C show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 180.

10 Figs. 76A, 76B and 76C show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 180.

Figs. 77A and 77B show an embodiment of the ink cartridge for use with single color, e.g., black color.

Figs. 78A and 78B show an embodiment of the ink cartridge where the elastic wave generating means is arranged on the supply port forming face.

15 Figs. 79A and 79B show an embodiment of the ink cartridge where the elastic wave generating means is arranged in an enclosing adjacent face.

Figs. 80A, 80B and 80C show an embodiment of the ink cartridge which houses plural types of ink.

Fig. 81 shows an embodiment of the ink-jet recording apparatus suitable for the ink cartridges shown in Figs. 77 - 80.

20 Fig. 82 shows still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 272 and the ink-jet recording apparatus according to the present invention.

Fig. 83 shows an embodiment of the ink cartridge where the actuator is arranged on the enclosing adjacent face.

Fig. 84 shows still another embodiment according to the present invention.

Fig. 85 shows still another embodiment according to the present invention.

Fig. 86 shows still another embodiment according to the present invention.

25 Figs. 87A, 87B and 87C show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge and the actuator according to the present invention.

Fig. 88 is an exemplary cross sectional view of the module 500 which is mounted to the container 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

30 [0019] The invention will now be described based on the preferred embodiments, which do not intend to limit the scope of the present invention, but exemplify the invention. All of the features and the combinations thereof described in the embodiment are not necessarily essential to the invention.

[0020] First of all, the principle of the present embodiment will be described. In the present embodiment, the present invention is applied to a technology by which to detect ink consumption state inside an ink container. The ink consumption state is detected by utilizing a liquid sensor including a piezoelectric element. The liquid sensor generates a detection signal which indicates vibration of the piezoelectric element corresponding to the ink consumption state.

[0021] As a feature of the present embodiment, in addition to the liquid sensor, a consumption data memory is provided in an ink cartridge. The consumption data memory is one which embodies the memory means for use with the liquid container in the present invention. The consumption data memory is rewritable and stores the consumption related data which relate to consumption state using the liquid sensor. By providing the consumption data memory, each liquid container can have the consumption related data necessary for each liquid container.

[0022] For example, the consumption related data are consumption state data obtained by using the liquid sensor. Suppose that an ink cartridge is removed from the ink-jet recording apparatus, and is mounted again. Since the consumption state data are held in the memory, loss of the consumption state data can be prevented. At the time of mounting, the consumption state data can be utilized by reading them out of the memory.

[0023] Moreover, the consumption related data may be data on detection characteristics detected corresponding to the consumption of the liquid. The detection related data are, for example, data indicating an acoustic impedance corresponding to the ink consumption state. This detection characteristic data are read out and utilized in detecting the consumption state. According to this embodiment, the ink-jet device need not have the detection characteristic data. A possible change in detection characteristics due to a design change of the cartridge may be coped with suitably.

[0024] The present embodiment is advantageous in case the ink cartridges have individual differences among them. The detection characteristic differs slightly among cartridges due to a manufacturing irregularity and so on. By storing the detection characteristics of individual cartridges in the consumption data memory, the effect caused by the individual difference can be reduced so as to improve the detection accuracy.

[0025] Moreover, the consumption data memory, as a memory means in the present invention, stores the ink related data therein. The memory means also stores data on a type of ink and so on. Moreover, this memory means stores other data such as a manufacturing data, cleaning sequence data, image processing data and so on.

[0026] Hereinbelow, the present embodiments will be further described in detail with reference of drawings. First, fundamental of the technology which detects the ink consumption based on vibration utilizing a piezoelectric device will be described, which is followed by various applications of the detection technology. In the present embodiment, the ink cartridge includes a liquid sensor and a consumption data memory. Thereafter, what is related to the consumption data memory will be described in detail.

[0027] In the present embodiment, the liquid sensor is constituted specifically by a piezoelectric device. In the following description, an actuator and an elastic wave generating means correspond to the liquid sensor. The consumption data memory is a semiconductor memory (semiconductor memory means).

10 Cartridge which detects the ink consumption

[0028] Fig. 1 is a cross sectional view of an embodiment of an ink cartridge for use with a single color, for example, the black ink. In the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 1, the detection method implemented is based on a method, among methods described above, in which the position of the liquid surface in the liquid container and whether or not the liquid is empty are detected by receiving the reflected wave of the elastic wave. As a means for generating and receiving the elastic wave, an elastic wave generating means 3 is utilized. An ink supply port 2 which comes in contact with an ink supply needle of the recording apparatus in a sealed manner is provided in a container 1 which houses the ink. In an outside portion of a bottom face 1a of the container 1, the elastic wave generating means 3 is mounted such that the elastic wave can be communicated, via the container, to the ink inside the container. In order that at a stage at which the ink K is almost used up, i.e. at the time when the ink becomes an ink-end state, the transfer of the elastic wave can change from the liquid to the gas, the elastic wave generating means 3 is provided in a slightly upward position from the ink supply port 2. Moreover, an elastic wave receiving means may be separately provided instead, so that the elastic wave generating means 3 is used as an elastic wave generating means only.

[0029] A packing ring 4 and a valve body 6 are provided in the ink supply port 2. Referring to Fig. 3, the packing ring 4 is engaged with the ink supply needle 32 communicating with a recording head 31, in a fluid-tight manner. The valve body 6 is constantly and elastically contacted against the packing ring 4 by way of a spring 5. When the ink supply needle 32 is inserted, the valve body 6 is pressed by the ink supply needle 32 so as to open an ink passage, so that ink inside the container 1 is supplied to the recording head 31 via the ink supply port 2 and the ink supply needle 32. On an upper wall of the container 1, there is mounted a semiconductor memory means 7 which stores data on ink inside

30 the ink cartridge.

[0030] Fig. 2 is a perspective view of the ink cartridge which stores plural types of inks, viewed from a back side thereof, according to an embodiment. A container 8 is divided by division walls into three ink chambers 9, 10 and 11. Ink supply ports 12, 13 and 14 are formed for the respective ink chambers. In a bottom face 8a of the respective ink chambers 9, 10 and 11, the respective elastic wave generating means 15, 16 and 17 are mounted so that the elastic waves can be transferred to the ink housed in each ink chamber via the container.

[0031] Fig. 3 is a cross sectional view showing an embodiment of a major part of the ink-jet recording apparatus suitable for the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2. A carriage 30 capable of reciprocating in the direction of the width of the recording paper is equipped with a sub-tank unit 33, while the recording head 31 is provided in a lower face of the sub-tank unit 33. Moreover, the ink supply needle 32 is provided in an ink cartridge mounting face side of the sub-tank unit 33.

[0032] Fig. 4 is a detailed cross sectional view of a sub-tank unit 33. The sub-tank unit 33 comprises the ink supply needle 32, the ink chamber 34, a flexible valve 36 and a filter 37. In the ink chamber 34, the ink is housed which is supplied from the ink cartridge via ink supply needle 32. The flexible valve 36 is so designed that the flexible valve 36 is opened and closed by means of the pressure difference between the ink chamber 34 and the ink supply passage 35. The sub-tank unit 33 is so constructed that the ink supply passage 35 is communicated with the recording head 31 so that the ink can be supplied up to the recording head 31.

[0033] Referring to Fig. 3, when the ink supply port 2 of the container 1 is inserted through the ink supply needle 32 of the sub-tank unit 33, the valve body 6 recedes against the spring 5, so that an ink passage is formed and the ink inside the container 1 flows into the ink chamber 34. At a stage where the ink chamber 34 is filled with ink, a negative pressure is applied to a nozzle opening of the recording head 31 so as to fill the recording head with ink. Thereafter, the recording operation is performed.

[0034] When the ink is consumed in the recording head 31 by the recording operation, a pressure in the downstream of the flexible valve 36 decreases. Then, the flexible valve 36 is positioned away from a valve body 38 so as to become opened. When the flexible valve 36 is opened, the ink in the ink chamber 34 flows into the recording head 31 through the ink passage 35. Accompanied by the ink which has flowed into the recording head 31, the ink in the container 1 flows into the sub-tank unit 33 via the ink supply needle 32.

[0035] While the recording apparatus is operating, a drive signal is supplied to the elastic wave generating means 3 at a detection timing which is set in advance, for example, at a certain period of time. The elastic wave generated by

the elastic wave generating means 3 is transferred to the ink by propagating through the bottom face 1a of the container 1 so as to be propagated to the ink.

[0036] By adhering the elastic wave generating means 3 to the container 1, the ink cartridge itself is given an ink remaining amount detecting capability. According to the present embodiment, since a process of embedding electrodes for use in detecting the liquid surface is unnecessary in the course of forming the container 1, an injection molding process can be simplified and the leakage of the liquid from a place in which the electrodes are supposedly embedded can be avoided, thus improving the reliability of the ink cartridge.

[0037] Figs. 5(I) - 5(V) show manufacturing methods of the elastic wave generating means 3, 15, 16 and 17. A base plate 20 is formed by material such as the burning-endurable ceramic. Referring to Fig. 5(I), first of all, a conductive material layer 21 which becomes an electrode at one side is formed on the base plate 20. Next, referring to Fig. 5(II), a green sheet 22 serving as piezoelectric material is placed on the conductive material layer 21. Next, referring to Fig. 5(III), the green sheet 22 is formed in a predetermined shape by a press processing or the like and is made into the form of a vibrator, and is air-dried. Thereafter, the burning is performed on the green sheet 22 at a burning temperature of, for example, 1200 °C. Next, referring to Fig. 5(IV), a conductive material layer 23 serving as other electrode is formed on the surface of the green sheet 22 so as to be polarized in a flexural-oscillatable manner. Finally, referring to Fig. 5(V), the base plate 20 is cut along each element. By fixing the base plate 20 in a predetermined face of the container 1 by use of adhesive or the like, the elastic wave generating means 3 can be fixed on the predetermined face of the container and the ink cartridge is completed which has a built-in function which detects the ink remaining amount.

[0038] Fig. 6 shows another embodiment of the elastic wave generating means 3 shown in Fig. 5. In the embodiment shown in Fig. 5, the conductive material layer 21 is used as a connecting electrode. On the other hand, in the embodiment shown in Fig. 6, connecting terminals 21a and 23a are formed by a solder in an upper position than the surface of the piezoelectric material layer comprised of the green sheet 22. By the provision of the connecting terminals 21a and 23a, the elastic wave generating means 3 can be directly mounted to the circuit board, so that inefficient connection such as one by lead wires can be avoided.

[0039] Now, the elastic wave is a type of waves which can propagate through gas, liquid and solid as medium. Thus, the wavelength, amplitude, phase, frequency, propagating direction and propagating velocity of the elastic wave change based on the change of medium in question. On the other hand, the state and characteristic of the reflected wave of the elastic wave change according to the change of the medium. Thus, by utilizing the reflected wave which changes based on the change of the medium through which the elastic wave propagates, the state of the medium can be observed. In a case where the state of the liquid inside the liquid container is to be detected by this method, an elastic wave transmitter-receiver will be used for example. Let us explain this by referring to embodiments shown in Figs. 1 - 3. First, the transmitter-receiver gives out the elastic wave to the medium, for example, the liquid or the liquid container. Then, the elastic wave propagates through the medium and arrives at the surface of the liquid. Since a boundary is formed between the liquid and the gas on the liquid surface, the reflected wave is returned to the transmitter-receiver. The transmitter-receiver receives the reflected wave. A distance between the liquid surface and a transmitter or receiver can be measured based on an overall traveled time of the reflected wave, or a damping factor of the amplitudes of the elastic wave generated by the transmitter and the reflected wave reflected on the liquid surface, and so on. Utilizing these, the state of the liquid inside the liquid container can be detected. The elastic wave generating means 3 may be used as a single unit of the transmitter-receiver in the method utilizing the reflected wave based on the change of the medium through which the elastic wave propagates, or a separately provided receiver may be mounted thereto.

[0040] As described above, in the elastic wave, generated by the elastic wave generating means 3, propagating through the ink liquid, the traveling time of the reflected wave occurring on the ink liquid surface to arrive at the elastic wave generating means 3 varies depending on density of the ink liquid and the liquid level. Thus, if the composition of ink is fixed, the traveling time of the reflected wave which occurred in the ink liquid surface varies depending on the ink amount. Therefore, the ink amount can be detected by detecting the time period during which the elastic wave generating means 3 generates the elastic wave and then the wave reflected from the ink surface arrives at the elastic wave generating means 3. Moreover, the elastic wave vibrates particles contained in the ink. Thus, in a case of using pigment-like ink which uses pigment as a coloring agent, the elastic wave contributes to prevent precipitation of the pigment or the like.

[0041] By providing the elastic wave generating means 3 in the container 1, when the ink of the ink cartridge approaches (decreases to) an ink-end state and the elastic wave generating means 3 can no longer receive the reflected wave, it is judged as an ink-near-end and thus can give indication to replace the cartridge.

[0042] Fig. 7 shows an ink cartridge according to another embodiment of the present invention. Plural elastic wave generating means 41 - 44 are provided on the side wall of the container 1, spaced at a variable interval from one another in the vertical direction. In the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 7, whether or not the ink is present at mounting levels of respective elastic wave generating means 41 - 44 can be detected by whether or not the ink is present at respective positions of the elastic wave generating means 41 - 44. For example, suppose that the liquid level of ink is at a point between the elastic wave generating means 44 and 43. Then, the elastic wave generating means 44 detects and judges

that the ink is empty while the elastic wave generating means 41, 42 and 43 detect and judge respectively that the ink is present. Thus, it can be known that the liquid level of ink lies in a level between the elastic wave generating means 44 and 43. Thus, provision of the plural elastic wave generating means 41 - 44 makes possible to detect the ink remaining amount in a step-by-step manner.

5 [0043] Fig. 8 and Fig. 9 show ink cartridges according to still another embodiments of the present invention. In an embodiment shown in Fig. 8, an elastic wave generating means 65 is mounted in a bottom face 1a formed aslope in the vertical direction. In an embodiment shown in Fig. 9, an elastic wave generating means 66 of an elongated shape in the vertical direction is provided in the vicinity of the bottom face of a side wall 1b.

10 [0044] According to the embodiments shown in Fig. 8 and Fig. 9, when part of the elastic wave generating means 65 and 66 is exposed from the liquid surface, the traveled time of the reflected wave and the acoustic impedance of the elastic waves generated by the elastic wave generating means 65 continuously change corresponding to the change ($\Delta h_1, \Delta h_2$) of the liquid surface. Thus, the process from the ink-near-end state to the ink-end state of ink remaining amount can be accurately detected by detecting the degree of change in the traveled time of the reflected wave or the acoustic impedance of the elastic waves.

15 [0045] In the above embodiments, description has been made by exemplifying the ink cartridge of a type where the ink is directly stored in the liquid container. As still another embodiment of the ink cartridge, the above-described elastic wave generating means may be mounted on an ink cartridge of another type where the container 1 is loaded with a porous elastic member and the porous elastic member is impregnated with the liquid ink. Though in the above embodiments a flexural oscillating type piezoelectric vibrator is used so as to suppress the increase of the cartridge size, a 20 vertically vibrating type piezoelectric vibrator may also be used. In the above embodiments, the elastic wave is transmitted and received by a same elastic wave generating means. In still another embodiment, the elastic wave generating means may be provided separately as one for use in transmitting the elastic wave and other for receiving the elastic wave, so as to detect the ink remaining amount.

25 [0046] Fig. 10 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention. Plural elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c on the bottom face 1a formed aslope in the vertical direction spaced at an interval are provided in the container 1. According to the present embodiment, the arrival time (traveled time) of the reflected waves of the elastic waves to the respective elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c in the respective mounting positions of the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c differs depending on whether or not the ink is present in the respective positions of the plural elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c. Thus, whether or 30 not the ink is present in the respective mounted position levels of the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c can be detected by scanning each elastic generating means (65a, 65b and 65c) and by detecting the traveled time of the reflected wave of the elastic wave in the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c. Hence, the ink remaining amount can be detected in a step-by-step manner. For example, suppose that the liquid level of ink is at a point between the elastic wave generating means 65b and 65c. Then, the elastic wave generating means 65c detects and judges that 35 the ink is empty while the elastic wave generating means 65a and 65b detect and judge respectively that the ink is present. By overall evaluating these results, it becomes known that the liquid level of ink lies in a level between the elastic wave generating means 65b and 65c.

40 [0047] Fig. 11 shows an ink cartridge according to still another embodiment of the present invention. In the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 11, a floating board 67 attached to a floater 68 covers the ink liquid surface in order to increase intensity of the reflected wave from the liquid surface. The floating board 67 is formed by material which has a high acoustic impedance therein and is ink-resistant, such as a ceramic board.

45 [0048] Fig. 12A and Fig. 12B shows another embodiments of the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 11. In the ink cartridge shown in Figs. 12A and 12B, similar to one shown in Fig. 11, a floating board 67 attached to a floater 68 covers the ink liquid surface in order to increase intensity of the reflected wave from the liquid surface. Referring to Fig. 12A, the elastic wave generating means 65 is fixed on the bottom face 1a formed aslope in the vertical direction. When the ink remaining amount becomes scarce and thus the elastic wave generating means 65 is exposed from the liquid surface, the arrival time of the reflected wave of the elastic waves generated by the elastic wave generating means 65 at the elastic wave generating means 65 changes, thus whether or not the ink is present in the mounting position levels of the elastic wave generating means 65 can be detected. Since the elastic wave generating means 65 is mounted in the bottom face 50 1a formed aslope in the vertical direction, a small amount of ink still remains even after the elastic wave generating means 65 detects and judges that ink is empty. Thus, the ink remaining amount at an ink-near-end point can be detected.

55 [0049] Referring to Fig. 12B, plural elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c on the bottom face 1a formed aslope in the vertical direction spaced at an interval are provided in the container 1. According to the present embodiment shown in Fig. 12B, the arrival time (traveled time) of the reflected waves of the elastic waves at the respective elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c in the respective mounting positions of the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c differs depending on whether or not the ink is present in the respective positions of the plural elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c. Thus, whether or not the ink is present in the respective mounted position

levels of the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c can be detected by scanning each elastic generating means (65a, 65b and 65c) and by detecting the traveled time of the reflected wave of the elastic wave in the elastic wave generating means 65a, 65b and 65c. For example, suppose that the liquid level of ink is at a point between the elastic wave generating means 65b and 65c. Then, the elastic wave generating means 65c detects and judges that the ink is empty while the elastic wave generating means 65a and 65b detect and judge respectively that the ink is present. By overall evaluating these results, it becomes known that the liquid level of ink lies in a level between the elastic wave generating means 65b and 65c.

[0050] Fig. 13A and Fig. 13B show ink cartridges according to still another embodiment of the present invention. In the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 13A, an ink absorbing member 74 is arranged in such a manner that at least part of the ink absorbing member 74 is disposed counter to a through hole 1c provided inside the container 1. An elastic wave generating means 70 is fixed to the bottom face 1a of the container 1 such that the elastic wave generating means 70 is positioned counter to the through hole 1c. In the ink cartridge shown in Fig. 13B, an ink absorbing member 75 is arranged in such a manner that the ink absorbing member 75 is disposed counter to a groove 1h formed so as to communicate with the through hole 1c.

[0051] According to the present embodiment shown in Figs. 13A and 13B, when the ink has been consumed and then the ink absorbing members 74 and 75 are exposed from the ink, the ink in the ink absorbing members 74 and 75 flows out by its dead weight, so that the ink is supplied to the recording head 31. When the ink is used up, the ink absorbing members 74 and 75 absorb the ink remaining in the through hole 1c, so that the ink is completely discharged from a concave part of the through hole 1c. Thereby, the state of the reflected wave of the elastic wave generated by the elastic wave generating means 70 changes at the time of the ink-end state, thus the ink-end state can be further reliably detected.

[0052] Figs. 14A, 14B and 14C show plan views of the through hole 1c according to another embodiment. As shown respectively in Figs. 14A, 14B and 14C, the plane shape of the through hole 1c may be of arbitrary shapes as long as the elastic wave generating means is capable of being mounted thereto.

[0053] Figs. 15A and 15B show cross sections of the ink-jet recording apparatus according to still another embodiment of the present invention. Fig. 15A shows a cross section of the ink-jet recording apparatus alone. Fig. 15B is a cross section of the ink-jet recording apparatus to which the ink cartridge 272 is mounted. A carriage 250 capable of reciprocating in the direction of the width of the ink-jet recording paper includes a recording head 252 in a lower face thereof. The carriage 250 includes a sub-tank unit 256 in an upper face of the recording head 252. The sub-tank unit 256 has a similar structure to that shown in Fig. 6. The sub-tank unit 256 has an ink supply needle 254 facing an ink cartridge 272 mounting side. In the carriage 250, there is provided a convex part 258 in a manner such that the convex part 258 is disposed counter to a bottom portion of the ink cartridge 272 and in an area where the ink cartridge 272 is to be mounted thereabove. The convex part 258 includes an elastic wave generating means 260 such as the piezoelectric vibrator.

[0054] Figs. 16A and 16B show an embodiment of the ink cartridge suitable for the recording apparatus shown in Figs. 15A and 15B. Fig. 16A shows an embodiment of the ink cartridge for use with a single color, for instance, the black color. The ink cartridge 272 according to the present embodiment, comprises a container which houses ink and an ink supply port 276 which comes in contact with an ink supply needle 254 of the recording apparatus in a sealed manner. In the container 274, there is provided the concave part 278, positioned in a bottom face 274a, which is to be engaged with the convex part 258. The c 280 concave part 278 houses ultrasound transferring material such as gelated material.

[0055] The ink supply port 276 includes a packing ring 282, a valve body 286 and a spring 284. The packing ring 282 is engaged with the ink supply needle 254 in a fluid-tight manner. The valve body 286 is constantly and elastically contacted against the packing ring 282 by way of the spring 284. When the ink supply needle 254 is inserted to the ink supply port 276, the valve body 286 is pressed by the ink supply needle 254 so as to open an ink passage. On an upper wall of the container 274, there is mounted a semiconductor memory means 288 which stores data on ink inside the ink cartridge and so on.

[0056] Fig. 16B shows an embodiment of the ink cartridge which houses plural types of ink. A container 290 is divided by division walls into plural areas, that are, three ink chambers 292, 294 and 296. The ink chambers 292, 294 and 296 have ink supply ports 298, 300 and 302, respectively. In the area counter to respective ink chambers 292, 294 and 296 in the bottom face 290a of the container 290, the gelated material 304 and 306 to propagate the elastic waves generated by the elastic wave generating means 260 is housed in a cylindrical shaped concave parts 310, 312 and 314.

[0057] Referring to Fig. 15B, when the ink supply port 276 of the ink cartridge 272 is inserted through the ink supply needle 254 of the sub-tank unit 256, the valve body 286 recedes against the spring 284, so that an ink passage is formed and the ink inside the ink cartridge 272 flows into the ink chamber 262. At a stage where the ink chamber 262 is filled with ink, a negative pressure is applied to a nozzle opening of the recording head 252 so as to fill the recording head with ink. Thereafter, the recording operation is performed. When the ink is consumed in the recording head 252 by the recording operation, a pressure in the downstream of a flexible valve 266 decreases. Then, the flexible valve 266 is positioned away from a valve body 270 so as to become opened. When the flexible valve 36 is opened, the ink in the

ink chamber 262 flows into the recording head 252 through the ink passage 35. Accompanied by the ink which has flowed into the recording head 252, the ink in the ink cartridge 272 flows into the sub-tank unit 256.

[0058] While the recording apparatus is operating, a drive signal is supplied to the elastic wave generating means 260 at a detection timing which is set in advance, for example, at a certain period of time. The elastic wave generated by the elastic wave generating means 260 is radiated from the convex part 258 and is transferred to the ink inside the ink cartridge 272 by propagating through the gelated material 280 in the bottom face 274a of the ink cartridge 272. Though the elastic wave generating means 260 is provided in the carriage 250 in Figs. 15A and 15B, the elastic wave generating means 260 may be provided inside the sub-tank unit 256.

[0059] Since the elastic wave generated by the elastic wave generating means 260 propagates through the ink liquid, the traveling time of the reflected wave occurring on the ink liquid surface to arrive at the elastic wave generating means 260 varies depending on density of the ink liquid and the liquid level. Thus, if the composition of ink is fixed, the traveling time of the reflected wave which occurred in the ink liquid surface varies depending on the ink amount. Therefore, the ink amount can be detected by detecting the time duration during which the reflected wave arrives at the elastic wave generating means 260 from the ink liquid surface when the ink liquid surface is excited by the elastic wave generating means 260. Moreover, the elastic wave generated by the elastic wave generating mean 260 vibrates particles contained in the ink. Thus, in a case of using pigment-like ink which uses pigment as a coloring agent, the elastic wave contributes to prevent precipitation of the pigment or the like.

[0060] After the printing operation and maintenance operation or the like and when the ink of the ink cartridge approaches (decreases to) an ink-end state and the elastic wave generating means 260 can no longer receive the reflected wave even after the elastic wave generating means sends out the elastic wave, it is judged that the ink is in an ink-near-end state and thus this judgment can give indication to replace the cartridge anew. Moreover, when the ink cartridge 272 is not mounted properly to the carriage 250, the shape of the elastic wave from the elastic generating means 260 changes in an extreme manner. Utilizing this, warning can be given to a user in the event that the extreme change in the elastic wave is detected, so as to prompt the user to check on the ink cartridge 272.

[0061] The traveling time of the reflected wave of the elastic wave generated by the elastic wave generating means 260 is affected by the density of ink housed in the container 274. Since the density of ink may differ by the type of ink used, data on the types of ink are stored in a semiconductor memory means 288, so that a detection sequence can be set based on the data and thus the ink remaining amount can be further precisely detected.

[0062] Fig. 17 shows an ink cartridge 272 according to still another embodiment of the present invention. In the ink cartridge 272 shown in Fig. 17, the bottom face 274a is formed aslope in the vertical direction.

[0063] In the ink cartridge 272 shown in Fig. 17, when the ink remaining amount is becoming low and part of a radiating area of the elastic wave generating means 260 is exposed from the liquid surface, the traveled time of the reflected wave of the elastic waves generated by the elastic wave generating means 260 continuously changes corresponding to the change Δh_1 of the liquid surface. The Δh_1 denotes change of the height of the bottom face 274a in both ends of the gelated material 280. Thus, the process from the ink-near-end state to the ink-end state of ink remaining amount can be accurately detected by detecting the degree of change in the traveled time of the reflected wave of the elastic wave generating means 260.

[0064] Fig. 18 shows an ink cartridge 272 and an ink-jet recording apparatus according to still another embodiment of the present invention. The ink-jet recording apparatus shown in Fig. 18 includes a convex part 258' in a side face 274b in an ink supply port 276 side of the ink cartridge 272. The convex part 258' includes an elastic wave generating means 260'. Gelated material 280' is provided in the side face 274b of the ink cartridge 272 so as to engage with the convex part 258'. According to the ink cartridge 272 shown in Fig. 18, when the ink remaining amount is becoming low and part of a radiating area of the elastic wave generating means 260' is exposed from the liquid surface, the acoustic impedance of the reflected wave of the elastic waves generated by the elastic wave generating means 260' continuously change corresponding to the change Δh_2 of the liquid surface. The Δh_2 denotes difference in the height of both ends of the gelated material 280'. Thus, the process from the ink-near-end state to the ink-end state of ink remaining amount can be accurately detected by detecting the degree of change in the traveled time of the reflected wave of the elastic wave generating means 260 or change in the acoustic impedance.

[0065] In the above embodiments, description has been made by exemplifying the ink cartridge of a type where the ink is directly stored in the liquid container 274. As still another embodiment of the ink cartridge, the above-described elastic wave generating means 260 may be applied to an ink cartridge of another type where the container 274 is loaded with a porous elastic member and the porous elastic member is impregnated with the ink. In the above embodiments, the elastic wave is transmitted and received by the same elastic wave generating means 260 and 260' when the ink remaining amount is detected based on the reflected wave at the liquid surface. The present invention is not limited thereby and for example, as still another embodiment the elastic wave generating means 260 may be provided separately as one for use in transmitting the elastic wave and other for receiving the elastic wave, so as to detect the ink remaining amount.

[0066] Fig. 19 shows still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 272 shown in Fig. 16. A floating board 316

attached to a floater 318 covers the ink liquid in order to increase intensity of the reflected wave from the ink liquid surface. The floating board 316 is preferably formed of material which has high acoustic impedance and is ink-resistant such as ceramic or the like.

[0067] Fig. 20 and Fig. 21 shows a detail and equivalent circuit of an actuator 106, which is an embodiment of the piezoelectric device of the present invention. The actuator explained herein is used at least for the method which detects the liquid consumption status in the liquid container by detecting a change in acoustic impedance. Especially, the actuator is used for the method which detects the liquid consumption status in the liquid container by detecting at least the change in acoustic impedance by detecting the resonant frequency from residual vibration. Fig. 20(A) is an enlarged plan view of the actuator 106. Fig. 20(B) shows a B-B cross-section of the actuator 106. Fig. 20(C) shows a C-C cross-section of the actuator 106. Fig. 21(A) and Fig. 21 (B) shows an equivalent circuit of the actuator 106. Each of Fig. 21(C) and Fig. 21(D) shows the actuator 106 and around the actuator 106, and the equivalent circuit of the actuator 106 when an ink is filled in the ink cartridge. Fig. 21(E) and Fig. 21(F) shows the actuator 106 and around the actuator 106, and the equivalent circuit of the actuator 106 when there is no ink in the ink cartridge.

[0068] The actuator 106 includes a base plate 178, a vibrating plate 176, a piezoelectric layer 160, an upper electrode 164 and a lower electrode 166, an upper electrode terminal 168, a lower electrode terminal 170, and a supplementary electrode 172. The base plate 178 has a circular shape opening 161 on approximately its center. The vibrating plate 176 is provided on one of the face, which is called as "right side" in following, of the base plate 178 such as to cover the opening 161. The piezoelectric layer 160 is disposed on right side of the surface of the vibrating plate 176. The upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166 sandwich the piezoelectric layer 160 from both sides. The upper electrode terminal 168 connects to the upper electrode 164 electrically. The lower electrode terminal 170 connects to the lower electrode 166 electrically. The supplementary electrode 172 is disposed between the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168 and connects both of the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168. Each of the piezoelectric layer 160, upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166 has a circular portion as its main portion. Each of the circular portion of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166 form a piezoelectric element.

[0069] The vibrating plate 176 is formed on the right side of the surface of the base plate 178 to cover the opening 161. The cavity 162 is formed by the portion of the vibrating plate 176, which faces the opening 161, and the opening 161 of the on the surface of the base plate 178. The face of the base plate 178 which is opposite side of the piezoelectric element, called as "back side" in following, is faced with the liquid container side. The cavity 162 is constructed such that the cavity 162 contacts with liquid. The vibrating plate 176 is mounted on the base plate 178 such that the liquid does not leak to the right side of the surface of the base plate 178 even if the liquid enters inside the cavity 162.

[0070] The lower electrode 166 is located on the right side of the vibrating plate 176, that is, opposite side against the liquid container. The lower electrode 166 is provided on the vibrating plate 176 such that the center of the circular portion of the lower electrode 166, which is a main portion of the lower electrode 166, and the center of the opening 161 substantially matches. The area of the circular portion of the lower electrode 166 is set to be smaller than the area of the opening 161. The piezoelectric layer 160 is formed on the right side of the surface of the lower electrode 166 such that the center of the circular portion and the center of the opening 161 substantially match. The area of the circular portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 is set to be smaller than the area of the opening 161 and larger than the area of the circular portion of the lower electrode 166.

[0071] The upper electrode 164 is formed on the right side of the surface of the piezoelectric layer 160 such that the center of the circular portion, which is a piezoelectric layer 160, and the center of the opening 161 substantially match. The area of the circular portion of the upper electrode 164 is set to be smaller than the area of the circular portion of the opening 161 and the piezoelectric layer 160 and larger than the area of the circular portion of the lower electrode 166.

[0072] Therefore, the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 has a structure to be sandwiched by the main portion of the upper electrode 164 and the main portion of the lower electrode each from right side face and back side face, and thus the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 can effectively drive and deform the piezoelectric layer 160. The circular portion, which is a main portion of each of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166, forms the piezoelectric element in the actuator 106. As explained above, the electric element contacts with the vibrating plate. Within the circular portion of the upper electrode 164, circular portion of the piezoelectric layer 160, the circular portion of the lower electrode, and the opening 161, the opening 161 has the largest area. By this structure, the vibrating region which actually vibrates within the vibrating plate is determined by the opening 161. Furthermore, each of the circular portion of the upper electrode 164 and the circular portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 and the circular portion of the lower electrode has smaller area than the area of the opening 161. The vibrating plate becomes easily vibrate. Within the circular portion of the lower electrode 166 and the circular portion of the upper electrode 164 which connects to the piezoelectric layer 160 electrically, the circular portion of the lower electrode 166 is smaller than the circular portion of the upper electrode 164. Therefore, the circular portion of the lower electrode 166 determines the portion which generates the piezoelectric effect within the piezoelectric layer 160.

[0073] The center of the circular portion of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166, which form the piezoelectric element, substantially match to the center of the opening 161. Moreover, the center of the circular shape opening 161, which determines the vibrating section of the vibrating plate 176, is provided on the approximately center of the actuator 106. Therefore, the center of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 matches to the center of the actuator 106. Because the main portion of the piezoelectric element and the vibrating section of the vibrating plate 176 have a circular shape, the vibrating section of the actuator 106 is symmetrical about a center of the actuator 106.

[0074] Because the vibrating section is symmetrical about a center of the actuator 106, the excitation of the unnecessary vibration occurred owing to the asymmetric structure can be prevented. Therefore, the accuracy of detecting the resonant frequency increases. Furthermore, because the vibrating section is symmetric about the center of the actuator 106, the actuator 106 is easy to manufacture, and thus the unevenness of the shape for each of the piezoelectric element can be decreased. Therefore, the unevenness of the resonant frequency for each of the piezoelectric element 174 decreases. Furthermore, because the vibrating section has an isotropic shape, the vibrating section is difficult to be influenced by the unevenness of the fixing during the bonding process. That is, the vibrating section is bonded to the liquid container uniformly. Therefore, the actuator 106 is easy to assemble to the liquid container.

[0075] Furthermore, because the vibrating section of the vibrating plate 176 has a circular shape, the lower resonant mode, for example, the primary resonant mode dominates on the resonant mode of the residual vibration of the piezoelectric layer 160, and thus the single peak appears on the resonant mode. Therefore, the peak and the noise can be distinguished clearly so that the resonant frequency can be clearly detected. Furthermore, the accuracy of the detection of the resonant frequency can be further increased by enlarge the area of the vibrating section of the circular shape vibrating plate 176 because the difference of the amplitude of the counter electromotive force and the difference of the amplitude of the resonant frequency occurred by whether the liquid exists inside the liquid container increase.

[0076] The displacement generated by the vibration of the vibrating plate 176 is larger than the displacement generated by the vibration of the base plate 178. The actuator 106 has a two layers structure that is constituted by the base plate 178 having a small compliance which means it is difficult to be displaced by the vibration, and the vibrating plate 176 having a large compliance which means it is easy to be displaced by the vibration. By this two layers structure, the actuator 106 can be reliably fixed to the liquid container by the base plate 178 and at the same time the displacement of the vibrating plate 176 by the vibration can be increased. Therefore, the difference of the amplitude of the counter electromotive force and the difference of the amplitude of the resonant frequency depended on whether the liquid exists inside the liquid container increases, and thus the accuracy of the detection of the resonant frequency increases. Furthermore, because the compliance of the vibrating plate 176 is large, the attenuation of the vibration decreases so that the accuracy of the detection of the resonant frequency increases. The node of the vibration of the actuator 106 locates on the periphery of the cavity 162, that is, around the margin of the opening 161.

[0077] The upper electrode terminal 168 is formed on the right side of the surface of the vibrating plate 176 to be electrically connected to the upper electrode 164 through the supplementary electrode 172. The lower electrode terminal 170 is formed on the right side of the surface of the vibrating plate 176 to be electrically connected to the lower electrode 166. Because the upper electrode 164 is formed on the right side of the piezoelectric layer 160, there is a difference in depth that is equal to the sum of the thickness of the piezoelectric layer 160 and the thickness of the lower electrode 166 between the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168. It is difficult to fill this difference in depth only by the upper electrode 164, and even it is possible to fill the difference in depth by the upper electrode 164, the connection between the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168 becomes weak so that the upper electrode 164 will be cut off. Therefore, this embodiment uses the supplementary electrode 172 as a supporting member to connects the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168. By this supplementary electrode 172, both of the piezoelectric layer 160 and the upper electrode 164 are supported by the supplementary electrode 172, and thus the upper electrode 164 can have desired mechanical strength, and also the upper electrode 164 and the upper electrode terminal 168 can be firmly connected.

[0078] The piezoelectric element and the vibrating section which faces to the piezoelectric element within the vibrating plate 176 constitute the vibrating section which actually vibrates in the actuator 106. Moreover, it is preferable to form the actuator 106 in one body by firing together the member included in the actuator 106. By forming the actuator 106 as one body, the actuator 106 becomes easy to be handled. Further, the vibration characteristic increases by increasing the strength of the base plate 178. That is, by increasing the strength of the base plate 178, only the vibrating section of the actuator 106 vibrates, and the portion other than the vibrating section of the actuator 106 does not vibrate. Furthermore, the prevention of the vibration of the portion other than the vibrating section of the actuator 106 can be achieved by increasing the strength of the base plate 178 and at the same time forming the actuator 106 as thinner and smaller as possible and forming the vibrating plate 176 as thinner as possible.

[0079] It is preferable to use lead zirconate titanate (PZT), lead lanthanum zirconate titanate (PLZT), or piezoelectric membrane without using lead as a material for the piezoelectric layer 160. It is preferable to use zirconia or aluminum as a material of the base plate 178. Furthermore, it is preferable to use same material as base plate 178 for a

material of vibrating plate 176. The metal such as gold, silver, copper, platinum, aluminum, and nickel having a electrical conductivity can be used for the material of the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, the upper electrode terminal 168, and the lower electrode terminal 170.

[0080] The actuator 106 constructed as explained above can be applied to the container which contains liquid. For example, the actuator 106 can be mounted on an ink cartridge used for the ink jet recording apparatus, an ink tank, or a container which contains washing liquid to wash the recording head.

[0081] The actuator 106 shown in the Fig. 20 and Fig. 21 is mounted on the predetermined position on the liquid container so that the cavity 162 can contact with the liquid contained inside the liquid container. When the liquid container is filled with liquid sufficiently, the inside and outside of the cavity 162 is filled with liquid. On the other hand, if the liquid inside liquid container consumed and the liquid level decreased under the mounting position of the actuator, there are conditions that liquid does not exit inside the cavity 162 or that liquid is remained only in the cavity 162 and air exits on outside the cavity 162. The actuator 106 detects at least the difference in the acoustic impedance occurred by this change in condition. By this detection of the difference in acoustic impedance, the actuator 106 can detect whether the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container or liquid is consumed more than predetermined level. Furthermore, the actuator 106 can detect the type of the liquid inside the liquid container.

[0082] The principle of the detection of the liquid level by the actuator will be explained.

[0083] To detect the acoustic impedance of a medium, an impedance characteristic or an admittance characteristic is measured. To measure the impedance characteristic or the admittance characteristic, for example, transmission circuit can be used. The transmission circuit applies a constant voltage on the medium and measure a current flow through the medium with changing a frequency. The transmission circuit provides a constant current to the medium and measures a voltage applied on the medium with changing a frequency. The change in current value and the voltage value measured at the transmission circuit shows the change in acoustic impedance. Furthermore, the change in a frequency f_m , which is a frequency when the current value or the voltage value becomes maximum or minimum, also shows the change in acoustic impedance.

[0084] Other than method shown above, the actuator can detect the change in the acoustic impedance of the liquid using the change only in the resonant frequency. The piezoelectric element, for example, can be used in a case of using the method of detecting the resonant frequency by measuring the counter electromotive force generated by the residual vibration, which is remained in the vibrating section after the vibration of the vibrating section of the actuator, as a method of using the change in the acoustic impedance of the liquid. The piezoelectric element is element which generates the counter electromotive force by residual vibration remained in the vibrating section of the actuator. The magnitude of the counter electromotive force changes with the amplitude of the vibrating section of the actuator. Therefore, the larger the amplitude of the vibrating section of the actuator, the easier to detect the resonant frequency. Moreover, depends on the frequency of the residual vibration at the vibrating section of the actuator, the period, on which the magnitude of the counter electromotive force changes, changes. Therefore, the frequency of the vibrating section of the actuator corresponds to the frequency of the counter electromotive force. Here, the resonant frequency means the frequency when the vibrating section of the actuator and the medium, which contacts to the vibrating section, are in a resonant condition.

[0085] To obtain the resonant frequency f_s , the waveform obtained by measuring the counter electromotive force when the vibrating section and the medium are in resonant condition is Fourier transformed. Because the vibration of the actuator is not a displacement for only one direction, but the vibration involves the deformation such as deflection and extension, the vibration has various kinds of frequency including the resonant frequency f_s . Therefore, the resonant frequency f_s is judged by Fourier transforming the waveform of the counter electromotive force when the piezoelectric element and the medium are in the resonant condition and then specifying the most dominating frequency components.

[0086] The frequency f_m is a frequency when the admittance of the medium is maximum or the impedance is minimum. The frequency f_m is different from the resonant frequency f_s with little value because of the dielectric loss and the mechanical loss. However, the frequency f_m is generally used as substitution for resonant frequency because it needs time for deriving the resonant frequency f_s from the frequency f_m which is actually measured. By inputting output of the actuator 106 to the transmission circuit, the actuator 106 can at least detect the acoustic impedance.

[0087] It is proved by the experiment that there is almost no differences with the resonant frequency obtained by the method, which measures the frequency f_m by measuring the impedance characteristic and admittance characteristic of the medium, and the method, which measures the resonant frequency f_s by measuring the counter electromotive force generated by the residual vibration at the vibrating section of the actuator.

[0088] The vibrating region of the actuator 106 is a portion which constitutes the cavity 162 that is determined by the opening 161 within the vibrating plate 176. When liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, liquid is filled in the cavity 162, and the vibrating region contacts with liquid inside the liquid container. When liquid does not exist in the liquid container sufficiently, the vibrating region contacts with the liquid which is remained in the cavity inside the liquid container, or the vibrating region does not contact with the liquid but contacts with the gas or vacuum.

[0089] The cavity 162 is provided on the actuator 106 of the present invention, and it can be designed that the liquid

inside the liquid container remains in the vibrating region of the actuator 106 by the cavity 162. The reason will be explained as follows.

[0090] Depends on the mounting position and mounting angle of the actuator 106 on the liquid container, there is a case in which the liquid attaches to the vibrating region of the actuator even the liquid level in the liquid container is lower than the mounting position of the actuator. When the actuator detects the existence of the liquid only from the existence of the liquid on the vibrating region, the liquid attached to the vibrating region of the actuator prevents the accurate detection of the existence of the liquid. For example, If the liquid level is lower than the mounting position of the actuator, and the drop of the liquid attaches to the vibrating region by the waving of the liquid caused by the shaking of the liquid container caused by the movement of the carriage, the actuator 106 will misjudges that there is enough liquid in the liquid container. In this way, the malfunction can be prevented by using the actuator having cavity.

[0091] Furthermore, as shown in Fig. 21(E), the case when the liquid does not exit in the liquid container and the liquid of the liquid container remains in the cavity 162 of the actuator 106 is set as the threshold value of the existence of the liquid. That is, if the liquid does not exist around the cavity 162, and the amount of the liquid in the cavity is smaller than this threshold value, it is judged that there is no ink in the liquid container. If the liquid exist around the cavity 162, and the amount of the liquid is larger than this threshold value, it is judged that there is ink in the liquid container. For example, when the actuator 106 is mounted on the side wall of the liquid container, it is judged that there is no ink in the liquid container when the liquid level inside the liquid container is lower than the mounting position of the actuator 106, and it is judged that there is ink inside the liquid container when the liquid level inside the liquid container is higher than the mounting position of the actuator 106. By setting the threshold value in this way, the actuator 106 can judge that there is no ink in the liquid container even if the ink attaches to the cavity again by shaking of the carriage after the ink in the cavity disappears because the amount of the ink attaches to the cavity again does not exceed the threshold value.

[0092] The operation and the principle of detecting the liquid condition of the liquid container from the resonant frequency of the medium and the vibrating section of the actuator 106 obtained by measuring the counter electromotive force will be explained reference to Fig. 20 and Fig. 21. A voltage is applied on each of the upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166 through the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170. The electric field is generated on the portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 where the piezoelectric layer 160 is sandwiched by the upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166. By this electric field, the piezoelectric layer 160 deforms. By the deformation of the piezoelectric layer 160, the vibrating region within the vibrating plate 176 deflects and vibrates. For some period after the deformation of the piezoelectric layer 160, the vibration with deflection remains in the vibrating section of the actuator 106.

[0093] The residual vibration is a free oscillation of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and the medium. Therefore, the resonant condition between the vibrating section and the medium can be easily obtained by applying the voltage of a pulse wave or a rectangular wave on the piezoelectric layer 160. Because the residual vibration vibrates the vibrating section of the actuator 106, the residual vibration also deforms the piezoelectric layer 160. Therefore, the piezoelectric layer 160 generates the counter electromotive force. This counter electromotive force is detected through the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, the upper electrode terminal 168, and the lower electrode terminal 170. Because the resonant frequency can be specified by this detected counter electromotive force, the liquid consumption status in the liquid container can be detected.

[0094] Generally, the resonant frequency f_s can be expressed as following.

$$f_s = 1/(2\pi(M \cdot C_{act}))^{1/2} \quad (1)$$

where M denotes the sum of an inertance of the vibrating section M_{act} and an additional inertance M' ; C_{act} denotes a compliance of the vibrating section.

[0095] Fig. 20(C) shows a cross section of the actuator 106 when the ink does not exist in the cavity in the present embodiment. Fig. 21(A) and Fig. 21(B) shows the equivalent circuit of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and the cavity 162 when the ink does not exist in the cavity.

[0096] The M_{act} is obtained by dividing the product of the thickness of the vibrating section and the density of the vibrating section by the area of the vibrating section. Furthermore, as shown in the Fig. 21(A), the M_{act} can be expressed as following in detail.

$$M_{act} = M_{pzt} + M_{electrode1} + M_{electrode2} + M_{vib} \quad (2)$$

Here, M_{pzt} is obtained by dividing the product of the thickness of the piezoelectric layer 160 in the vibrating section and the density of the piezoelectric layer 160 by the area of the piezoelectric layer 160. $M_{electrode1}$ is obtained by dividing the product of the thickness of the upper electrode 164 in the vibrating section and the density of the upper electrode 164 by the area of the upper electrode 164. $M_{electrode2}$ is obtained by dividing the product of the thickness of the lower electrode 166 in the vibrating section and the density of the lower electrode 166 by the area of the lower electrode 166.

[0097] M_{vib} is obtained by dividing the product of the thickness of the vibrating plate 176 in the vibrating section and the density of the vibrating plate 176 by the area of the vibrating region of the vibrating plate 176. However each of the size of the area of the vibrating region of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, and vibrating plate 176 have a relationship as shown above, the difference among each of the area of the vibrating region is prefer to be microscopic to enable the calculation of the Mact from the thickness, density, and area as whole of the vibrating section.

[0098] Moreover, it is preferable that the portion other than the circular portion which is a main portion of each of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166 is microscopic so that it can be ignored compared to the main portion. Therefore, Mact is sum of the inertance of the each of the vibrating region of the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, the piezoelectric layer 160, and the vibrating plate 176 in the actuator 106. Moreover, the compliance Cact is a compliance of the portion formed by the each of the vibrating region of the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, the piezoelectric layer 160, and the vibrating plate 176.

[0099] Fig. 21(A), Fig. 21(B), Fig. 21(D), and Fig. 21(F) show the equivalent circuit of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and the cavity 162. In these equivalent circuits, Cact shows a compliance of the vibrating section of the actuator 106. Each of the Cpzt, Celectrode1, Celectrode2, and Cvib shows the compliance of the vibrating section of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, and the vibrating plate 176. Cact can be shown as following equation.

$$1/Cact = (1/Cpzt) + (1/Celectrode1) + (1/Celectrode2) + (1/Cvib) \quad (3)$$

[0100] From the equation (2) and (3), Fig. 21(A) can be expressed as Fig. 21(B).

[0101] The compliance Cact shows the volume which can accept the medium by the deformation generated by the application of the pressure on the unit area of the vibrating section. In other words, the compliance Cact shows the easiness to be deformed.

[0102] Fig. 21(C) shows the cross section of the actuator 106 when the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, and the periphery of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is filled with the liquid. The M'max shown in Fig. 21(C) shows the maximum value of the additional inertance when the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, and the periphery of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is filled with the liquid. The M'max can be expressed as

$$M'max = (\pi * \rho / (2 * k^3)) * (2 * (2 * k * a)^3 / (3 * \pi)) / (\pi * a^2)^2 \quad (4)$$

where a denotes the radius of the vibrating section; ρ denotes the density of the medium; and k denotes the wave number. The equation (4) applies when the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is circular shape having the radius of "a". The additional inertance M' shows the quantity that the mass of the vibrating section is increased virtually by the effect of the medium which exists around the vibrating section.

[0103] As shown in Fig. 4, the M'max can changes significantly by the radius of the vibrating section "a" and the density of the medium ρ .

[0104] The wave number k can be expressed by following equation.

$$k = 2 * \pi * f_{act} / c \quad (5)$$

where f_{act} denotes the resonant frequency of the vibrating section when the liquid does not contact with the vibrating section; and c denotes the speed of the sound propagate through the medium.

[0105] Fig. 21(D) shows an equivalent circuit of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and the cavity 162 as in the case of Fig. 21(C) when the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, and the periphery of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is filled with the liquid.

[0106] Fig. 21(E) shows the cross section of the actuator 106 when the liquid in the liquid container is consumed, and there is no liquid around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, and the liquid remains in the cavity 162 of the actuator 106. The equation (4) shows the maximum inertance M'max determined by such as the ink density ρ when the liquid container is filled with the liquid. On the other hand, if the liquid in the liquid container is consumed and liquid existed around the vibrating section of the actuator 106 becomes gas or vacuum with the liquid remaining in the cavity 162, the M' can be expressed as following equation.

$$M' = \rho * t / S \quad (6)$$

where t denotes the thickness of the medium related to the vibration; S denotes the area of the vibrating region of the actuator 106. If this vibrating region is circular shape having a radius of "a", the S can be shown as $S = \pi * a^2$. Therefore, the additional inertance M' follows the equation (4) when the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, and

the periphery of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is filled with the liquid. The additional inertance M' follows the equation (6) when the liquid in the liquid container is consumed, and there is no liquid exits around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, and the liquid is remained in the cavity 162.

[0107] Here, as shown in Fig. 21(E), let the additional inertance M' , when the liquid in the liquid container is consumed, and there is no liquid exits around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, and the liquid is remained in the cavity 162, as M'_{cav} to distinguish with the additional inertance M'_{max} , which is the additional inertance when the periphery of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is filled with the liquid.

[0108] Fig. 21(F) shows an equivalent circuit of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and the cavity 162 in the case of Fig. 21(E) when the liquid in the liquid container is consumed, and there is no liquid around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, and the liquid remains in the cavity 162 of the actuator 106.

[0109] Here, the parameters related to the status of the medium are density of the medium ρ and the thickness of the medium t in equation (6). When the liquid is sufficiently filled in the liquid container, the liquid contacts with the vibrating section of the actuator 106. When the liquid is insufficiently filled in the liquid container, the liquid is remained in the cavity, or the gas or vacuum contacts with the vibrating section of the actuator 106. If let the additional inertance during the process of the shifting from the M'_{max} of Fig. 21(C) to the M'_{var} of Fig. 21(E) when the liquid around the actuator 106 is consumed, because the thickness of the medium t changes according to the containing status of the liquid in the liquid container, the additional inertance M'_{var} changes, and resonant frequency also changes. Therefore, the existence of the liquid in the liquid container can be detected by specifying the resonant frequency. Here, if let $t = d$, as shown in Fig. 21(E) and using the equation (6) to express the m'_{cav} , the equation (7) can be obtained by substituting the thickness of the cavity "d" into the "t" in the equation (6).

$$M'_{cav} = \rho * d / S \quad (7)$$

[0110] Moreover, if the medium are different types of liquid with each other, the additional inertance M' changes and resonant frequency f_s also changes because the density ρ is different according to the difference of the composition. Therefore, the types of the liquid can be detected by specifying the resonant frequency f_s . Moreover, when only one of the ink or air contacts with the vibrating section of the actuator 106, and the ink and air is not existing together, the difference in M' can be detected by calculating the equation (4).

[0111] Fig. 22(A) is a graph which shows the relationship between the ink quantity inside the ink tank and the resonant frequency f_s of the ink and the vibrating section. Here, the case for the ink will be explained as an example of the liquid. The vertical axis shows the resonant frequency f_s , and the horizontal axis shows the ink quantity. When the ink composition is constant, the resonant frequency increases according to the decreasing of the ink quantity.

[0112] When ink is sufficiently filled in the ink container, and ink is filled around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, the maximum additional inertance M'_{max} becomes the value shown in the equation (4). When the ink is consumed, and there is no ink around the vibrating region of the actuator 106, and the ink remains in the cavity 162, the additional inertance M'_{var} is calculated by the equation (6) based on the thickness of the medium t . Because the "t" used in the equation (6) is the thickness of the medium related to the vibration, the process during which the ink is consumed gradually can be detected by forming the "d" (refer to Fig. 20(B)) of the cavity 162 of the actuator 106 as small as possible, that is, forming the thickness of the base plate 178 as sufficiently thinner as possible (refer to Fig. 21(C)). Here, let the t_{ink} as the thickness of the ink involved with the vibration, and t_{ink_max} as the t_{ink} when the additional inertance is M'_{max} . For example, the actuator 106 is mounted on the bottom of the ink cartridge horizontally to the surface of the ink. If ink is consumed, and the ink level becomes lower than the height t_{ink_max} from the actuator 106, the M'_{var} gradually changes according to the equation (6), and the resonant frequency f_s gradually changes according to the equation (1). Therefore, until the ink level is within the range of "t", the actuator 106 can gradually detect the ink consumption status.

[0113] Furthermore, by enlarge or lengthen the vibrating section of the actuator 106 and arrange the actuator 106 along a lengthwise direction, the "S" in the equation (6) changes according to the change of ink level with ink consumption. Therefore, the actuator 106 can detect the process while the ink is gradually consumed. For example, the actuator 106 is mounted on the side wall of the ink cartridge perpendicularly to the ink surface. When the ink is consumed and the ink level reaches to the vibrating region of the actuator 106, because the additional inertance M' decreases with the decreasing of the ink level, the resonant frequency f_s gradually increases according to the equation (1). Therefore, unless the ink level is within the range of the radius $2a$ of the cavity 162 (refer to Fig. 21(C)), the actuator 106 can gradually detect the ink consumption status. The curve X in Fig. 22(A) shows the relationship between the ink quantity contained inside of the ink tank and the resonant frequency f_s of the ink and the vibrating section when the vibrating region of the actuator 106 is formed sufficiently large or long. It can be understand that the resonant frequency f_s of the ink and vibrating section gradually changes with the decrease of the ink quantity inside the ink tank.

[0114] In detail, the case when the actuator 106 can detect the process of the gradual consumption of the ink is the case when the liquid and gas having different density with each other are existed together and also involved with vibra-

tion. According to the gradual consumption of the ink, the liquid decreases with increasing of the gas in the medium involved with the vibration around the vibrating region of the actuator 106. For example, the case when the actuator 106 is mounted on the ink cartridge horizontally to the ink surface, and t-ink is smaller than the t-ink-max, the medium involved with the vibration of the actuator 106 includes both of the ink and the gas. Therefore, the following equation (8) can be obtained if let the area of the vibrating region of the actuator 106 as S and express the status when the additional inertance is below M'max in the equation (4) by additional mass of the ink and the gas.

$$M' = M'_{air} + M'_{ink} = \rho_{air} * t_{air}/S + \rho_{ink} * t_{ink}/S \quad (8)$$

where M'_{max} is an inertance of an air; M'_{ink} is an inertance of an ink; ρ_{air} is a density of an air; ρ_{ink} is a density of an ink; t_{air} is the thickness of the air involved with the vibration; and t_{ink} is the thickness of the ink involved with the vibration. In case when the actuator 106 is mounted on the ink cartridge approximately horizontally to the ink surface, the t_{air} increases and the t_{ink} decreases with the increase of the gas and the decrease of the ink within the medium involved with the vibration around the vibrating region of the actuator 106. The additional inertance M' gradually decreases, and the resonant frequency gradually increases by above changes of the t_{air} and the t_{ink} . Therefore, the ink quantity remained inside the ink tank or the ink consumption quantity can be detected. The equation (7) depends only on the density of the liquid because of the assumption that the density of the air is small compare to the density of the liquid so that the density of the air can be ignored.

[0115] When the actuator 106 is provided on the ink cartridge substantially perpendicular to the ink surface, the status can be expressed as the equivalent circuit, not shown in the figure, on which the region, where the medium involved with the vibration of the actuator 106 is ink only, and the region, where the medium involved with the vibration of the actuator 106 is gas, can be expressed as parallel circuit. If let the area of the region where the medium involved with the vibration of the actuator 106 is ink only as S_{ink} , and let the area of the region where the medium involved with the vibration of the actuator 106 is gas only as S_{air} , the following equation (9) can be obtained.

$$1/M' = 1/M'_{air} + 1/M'_{ink} = S_{air}/(\rho_{air} * t_{air}) + S_{ink}/(\rho_{ink} * t_{ink}) \quad (9)$$

[0116] The equation (9) can be applied when the ink is not held in the cavity of the actuator 106. The case when the ink is held in the cavity can be calculated using the equation (7), (8), and (9).

[0117] In the case when the thickness of the base plate 178 is thick, that is, the depth of the cavity 162 is deep and d is comparatively close to the thickness of the medium t_{ink_max} , or in the case when using actuator having a very small vibrating region compared to height of the liquid container, the actuator does not detect the process of the gradual decrease of the ink but actually detects whether the ink level is higher or lower than the mounting position of the actuator. In other words, the actuator detects the existence of the ink at the vibrating region of the actuator. For example, the curve Y in Fig. 22(A) shows the relationship between the ink quantity in the ink tank and the resonant frequency f_s of the vibrating section when the vibrating section is small circular shape. The curve Y shows that the resonant frequency f_s of the ink and the vibrating section changes extremely during the range of change of ink quantity Q , which corresponds to the status before and after the ink level in the ink tank passes the mounting position of the actuator. By this changes of the resonant frequency f_s , it can be detected whether the ink quantity remained in the ink tank is more than the predetermined quantity.

[0118] The method of using the actuator 106 for detecting the existence of the liquid is more accurate than the method which calculates the quantity of ink consumption by the software because the actuator 106 detects the existence of the ink by directly contacting with the liquid. Furthermore, the method using an electrode to detects the existence of the ink by conductivity is influenced by the mounting position to the liquid container and the ink type, but the method using the actuator 106 to detects the existence of the liquid does not influenced by the mounting position to the liquid container and the ink type. Moreover, because both of the oscillation and detection of the existence of the liquid can be done by the single actuator 106, the number of the sensor mounted on the liquid container can be reduced compare to the method using separate sensor for oscillation and the detection of the existence of the liquid. Therefore, the liquid container can be manufactured at a low price. Furthermore, the sound generated by the actuator 106 during the operation of the actuator 106 can be reduced by setting the vibrating frequency of the piezoelectric layer 160 out of the audio frequency.

[0119] Fig. 22(B) shows the relationship between the density of the ink and the resonant frequency f_s of the ink and the vibrating section of the curve Y shown in Fig. 22(A). Ink is used as an example of liquid. As shown in Fig. 22(B), when ink density increases, the resonant frequency f_s decreases because the additional inertance increases. In other words, the resonant frequency f_s are different with the types of the ink. Therefore, By measuring the resonant frequency f_s , it can be confirmed whether the ink of a different density has been mixed together during the re-filling of the ink to the ink tank.

[0120] Therefore, the actuator 106 can distinguish the ink tank which contains the different type of the ink.

[0121] The condition when the actuator 106 can accurately detects the status of the liquid will be explained in detail in following. The case is assumed that the size and the shape of the cavity is designed so that the liquid can be remained in the cavity 162 of the actuator 106 even when the liquid inside the liquid container is empty. The actuator 106 can detect the status of the liquid even when the liquid is not filled in the cavity 162 if the actuator 106 can detect the status of the liquid when the liquid is filled in the cavity 162.

[0122] The resonant frequency f_s is a function of the inertance M . The inertance M is a sum of the inertance of the vibrating section M_{act} and the additional inertance M' . Here, the additional inertance M' has the relationship with the status of the liquid. The additional inertance M' is a quantity of a virtual increase of a mass of the vibrating section by the effect of the medium existed around the vibrating section. In other words, the additional inertance M' is the amount of increase of the mass of the vibrating section which is increased by the vibration of the vibrating section that virtually absorbs the medium.

[0123] Therefore, when the M'_{cav} is larger than the M'_{max} in the equation (4), all the medium which is virtually absorbed is the liquid remained in the cavity 162. Therefore, the status when the M'_{cav} is larger than the M'_{max} is same with the status that the liquid container is fill with liquid: The resonant frequency f_s does not change because the M' does not change in this case. Therefore, the actuator 106 cannot detect the status of the liquid in the liquid container.

[0124] On the other hand, if the M'_{cav} is smaller than the M'_{max} in the equation (4), the medium which is virtually absorbed is the liquid remained in the cavity 162 and the gas or vacuum in the liquid container. In this case, because the M' changes, which is different with the case when the liquid is filled in the liquid container, the resonant frequency f_s changes. Therefore, the actuator 106 can detect the status of the liquid in the liquid container.

[0125] The condition whether the actuator 106 can accurately detect the status of the liquid is that the M'_{cav} is smaller than the M'_{max} when the liquid is remained in the cavity 162 of the actuator 106, and the liquid container is empty. The condition $M'_{max} > M'_{cav}$, on which the actuator 106 can accurately detect the status of the liquid, does not depend on the shape of the cavity 162.

[0126] Here, the M'_{cav} is the mass of the liquid of the volume which is substantially equal to the volume of the cavity 162. Therefore, the condition, which can detect the status of the liquid accurately, can be expressed as the condition of the volume of the cavity 162 from the inequality $M'_{max} > M'_{cav}$. For example, if let the radius of the opening 161 of the circular shaped cavity 162 as "a" and the thickness of the cavity 162 as "d", then the following inequality can be obtained.

$$M'_{max} > \rho * d / \pi a^2 \quad (10)$$

By expanding the inequality (10), the following condition can be obtained.

$$a/d > 3 * \pi/8 \quad (11)$$

The inequality (10) and (11) are valid only when the shape of the cavity 162 is circular. By using the equation when the M'_{max} is not circular and substituting the area πa^2 with its area, the relationship between the dimension of the cavity such as a width and a length of the cavity and the depth can be derived.

[0127] Therefore, if the actuator 106 has the cavity 162 which has the radius of the opening 161 "a" and the depth of the cavity "d" that satisfy the condition shown in inequality (11), the actuator 106 can detect the liquid status without malfunction even when the liquid container is empty and the liquid is remained in the cavity 162.

[0128] Because the additional inertance influences the acoustic impedance characteristic, it can be said that the method of measuring the counter electromotive force generated in actuator 106 by residual vibration measures at least the change of the acoustic impedance.

[0129] Furthermore, according to the present embodiment, the actuator 106 generates the vibration, and the actuator 106 itself measures the counter electromotive force in actuator 106 which is generated by the residual vibration remained after the vibration of the actuator 106. However, it is not necessary for the vibrating section of the actuator 106 to provide the vibration to the liquid by the vibration of the actuator 106 itself which is generated by the driving voltage. Even the vibrating section itself does not oscillates, the piezoelectric layer 160 deflects and deforms by vibrates together with the liquid, which contacts with the vibrating section with some range. This residual vibration generates the counter electromotive force voltage in the piezoelectric layer 160 and transfer this counter electromotive force voltage to the upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166. The status of the liquid can be detected using this phenomenon. For example, in case of the ink jet recording apparatus, the status of the ink tank or the ink contained inside the ink tank can be detected using the vibration around the vibrating section of the actuator which is generated by the vibration generated by the reciprocating motion of the carriage to scanning the print head during the printing operation.

[0130] Fig. 23(A) and Fig. 23(B) shows a waveform of the residual vibration of the actuator 106 and the measuring method of the residual vibration. The change of the ink level at the level of the mounting position of the actuator 106 in the ink cartridge can be detected by the change in the frequency or the amplitude of the residual vibration remained

after the oscillation of the actuator 106. In Fig. 23(A) and Fig. 23(B), the vertical axis shows the voltage of the counter electromotive force generated by the residual vibration of the actuator 106, and the horizontal axis shows the time. By the residual vibration of the actuator 106, the waveform of the analog signal of the voltage generates as shown in Fig. 23(A) and Fig. 23(B). Then, the analog signal is converted to a digital numerical value corresponding to the frequency of the signal.

[0131] In the example shown in Fig. 23(A) and Fig. 23(B), the existence of the ink is detected by measuring the time during the generation of the four numbers of pulses from the fourth pulse to the eighth pulse of the analog signal.

[0132] In detail, after the actuator 106 oscillates, the number of the times when the analog signal get across the predetermined reference voltage from the low voltage side to the high voltage side. The digital signal is set to be high while the analog signal becomes fourth counts to the eighth counts, and the time during fourth counts to the eighth counts is measured by predetermined clock pulse.

[0133] Fig. 23(A) shows the waveform when the ink level is above the level of the mounting position of the actuator 106. Fig. 23(B) shows the waveform when the ink level is below the level of the mounting position of the actuator 106. Comparing the Fig. 23(A) and Fig. 23(B), the time of the Fig. 23(A) during the fourth counts to the eighth counts is longer than the time of the Fig. 23(B). In other words, depends on the existence of the ink, the time from the fourth counts to the eighth counts is different. By using this difference of the time, the consumption status of the ink can be detected. The reason to count the analog signal from the fourth counts is to start the measurement of the time after the vibration of the actuator 106 becomes stable. It is only one of the example of starting the measurement from fourth counts, but measurement can be started from the desired counts.

[0134] The signals from the fourth counts to the eighth counts are detected, and the time from the fourth counts to the eighth counts is measured by the predetermined clock pulse. By this measurement, the resonant frequency can be obtained. The clock pulse is prefer to be a pulse having a same clock with the clock for controlling such as the semiconductor memory device which is mounted on the ink cartridge. It does not necessary to measure the time until the eighth counts, but the time until the desired counts can be measured. In Fig. 23, the time from the fourth counts to the eighth counts is measured, however, the time during the different interval of the counts also can be detected according to the circuit configuration which detects the frequency.

[0135] For example, when the ink quality is stable and the fluctuation of the amplitude of the peak is small, the resonant frequency can be detected by detecting the time from the fourth counts to the sixth counts to increase the speed of detection. Moreover, when the ink quality is unstable and the fluctuation of the amplitude of the pulse is large, the time from the fourth counts to the twelfth counts can be detected to detect the residual vibration accurately.

[0136] Furthermore, as other embodiments, the wave number of the voltage waveform of the counter electromotive force during the predetermined period can be counted. More specifically, after the actuator 106 oscillates, the digital signal is set to be high during the predetermined period, and the number of the times when the analog signal is get across the predetermined reference voltage from the low voltage side to the high voltage side is counted. By measuring the count number, the existence of the ink can be detected.

[0137] Furthermore, it can be known by comparing Fig. 23(A) with Fig. 23(B), the amplitude of the waveform of the counter electromotive force is different when the ink is filled in the ink cartridge and when the ink is not existed in the ink cartridge. Therefore, the ink consumption status in the ink cartridge can be detected by measuring the amplitude of the waveform of the counter electromotive force without calculating the resonant frequency. More specifically, for example, a reference voltage is set between the peak point of the waveform of the counter electromotive force of the Fig. 23(A) and the peak point of the waveform of the counter electromotive force of the Fig. 23(B). Then, after the actuator 106 oscillates, set the digital signal to be high at the predetermined time. Then, if the waveform of the counter electromotive force get across the reference voltage, it can be judged that there is no ink in the ink cartridge. If the waveform of the counter electromotive force does not get across the reference voltage, it can be judged that there is ink in the ink cartridge.

[0138] Fig. 24 shows the manufacturing method of the actuator 106. A plurality of the actuators 106, four numbers in the case of the Fig. 24, are formed as one body. The actuator 106 shown in Fig. 25 is manufactured by cutting the plurality of actuator 106, which is formed in one body as shown in Fig. 24, at each of the actuator 106. If the each of the piezoelectric elements of the each of the plurality of the actuator 106, which is formed in one body as shown in Fig. 24, are circular shape, the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 20 can be manufactured by cutting the actuator 106, which is formed as one body, at each of actuator 106. By forming a plurality of the actuator 106 in one body, a plurality of actuator 106 can be manufactured effectively at the same time, and also the handling during the transportation becomes easy.

[0139] The actuator 106 has a thin plate or a vibrating plate 176, a base plate 178, an elastic wave generating device or piezoelectric element 174, a terminal forming member or an upper electrode terminal 168, and a terminal forming member or a lower electrode terminal 170. The piezoelectric element 174 includes a piezoelectric vibrating plate or a piezoelectric layer 160, an upper electrode 164, and a lower electrode 166. The vibrating plate 176 is formed on the top surface of the base plate 178, and the lower electrode 166 is formed on the top surface of the vibrating plate 176. The piezoelectric layer 160 is formed on the top surface of the lower electrode 166, and the upper electrode 164

is formed on the top surface of the piezoelectric layer 160. Therefore, the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 is formed by sandwiching the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 by the main portion of the upper electrode 164 and the main portion of the lower electrode 166 from top side and from bottom side.

[0140] A plurality of the piezoelectric element 174, four numbers in the case of Fig. 24, is formed on the vibrating plate 176. The lower electrode 166 is formed on the top surface of the vibrating plate 176. The piezoelectric layer 160 is formed on the top surface of the lower electrode 166, and the upper electrode 164 is formed on the top surface of the piezoelectric layer 160. The upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 are formed on the end portion of the upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166. The four numbers of the actuator 106 are used separately by cutting each of the actuator 106 separately.

[0141] Fig. 25 shows a cross-section of a part of the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 25. The through hole 178a is formed on the face of the base plate 178 which faces with the piezoelectric element 174. The through hole 178a is sealed by the vibrating plate 176. The vibrating plate 176 is formed by the material which has electric insulating characteristic such as alumina and zirconium oxide and also possible to be deformed elastically. The piezoelectric element 174 is formed on the vibrating plate 176 to face with the through hole 178a. The lower electrode 166 is formed on the surface of the vibrating plate 176 so as to be extended to the one direction, left direction in Fig. 26, from the region of the through hole 178a. The upper electrode 164 is formed on the surface of the piezoelectric layer 160 so as to be extended to the opposite direction of the lower electrode 166, which is right direction in Fig. 26, from the region of the through hole 178a. Each of the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 is formed on the surface of the each of supplementary electrode 172 and the lower electrode 166, respectively. The lower electrode terminal 170 with the lower electrode 166 electrically, and the upper electrode terminal 168 contacts with the upper electrode 164 electrically through the supplementary electrode 172 to deliver a signal between the piezoelectric element and the outside of the actuator 106. The upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 has a height higher than the height of the piezoelectric element which is the sum of the height of the electrodes and the piezoelectric layer.

[0142] Fig. 27 shows the manufacturing method of the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 24. First, a through hole 940a is formed on a green sheet 940 by perforating the green sheet 940 by a press or laser processing. The green sheet 940 becomes the base plate 178 after the burning process. The green sheet 940 is formed by the material such as ceramic material. Then, a green sheet 941 is laminated on the surface of the green sheet 940. The green sheet 941 becomes the vibrating plate 176 after the burning process. The green sheet 941 is formed by the material such as zirconium oxide. Then, a conductive layer 942, the piezoelectric layer 160, and a conductive layer 944 is formed on the surface of the green sheet 941 sequentially by the method such as printing. The conductive layer 942 becomes the lower electrode 166, and the conductive layer 944 becomes the upper electrode 164 after the burning process. Next, the green sheet 940, the green sheet 941, the conductive layer 942, the piezoelectric layer 160, and the conductive layer 944 are dried and burned. The spacer member 947 and 948 are provided on the green sheet 941 to raising the height of the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 to be higher than the piezoelectric element. The spacer member 947 and 948 is formed by printing the same material with the green sheet 940 and 941 or by laminating the green sheet on the green sheet 941. By this spacer member 947 and 948, the quantity of the material of the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170, which is a noble metal, can be reduced. Moreover, because the thickness of the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 can be reduced, the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 can be accurately printed to be a stable height.

[0143] If a connection part 944', which is connected with the conductive layer 944, and the spacer member 947 and 948 are formed at the same time when the conductive layer 942 is formed, the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 can be easily formed and firmly fixed. Finally, the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 are formed on the end region of the conductive layer 942 and the conductive layer 944. During the forming of the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170, the upper electrode terminal 168 and the lower electrode terminal 170 are formed to be connected with the piezoelectric layer 160 electrically.

[0144] Fig. 28 shows further other embodiment of the ink cartridge of the present invention. Fig. 28(A) is a cross sectional view of the bottom part of the ink cartridge of the present embodiment. The ink cartridge of the present embodiment has a through hole 1c on the bottom face 1a of the container 1, which contains ink. The bottom part of the through hole 1c is closed by the actuator 650 and forms an ink storing part.

[0145] Fig. 28(B) shows a detailed cross section of the actuator 650 and the through hole 1c shown in Fig. 28(A). Fig. 28(C) shows a plan view of the actuator 650 and the through hole 1c shown in Fig. 28(B). The actuator 650 has a vibrating plate 72 and a piezoelectric element 73 which is fixed to the vibrating plate 72. The actuator 650 is fixed to the bottom face of the container 1 such that the piezoelectric element 73 can face to the through hole 1c through the vibrating plate 72 and the base plate 72. The vibrating plate 72 can be elastically deformed and is ink resistant.

[0146] Amplitude and frequency of the counter electromotive force generated by the residual vibration of the piezoelectric element 73 and the vibrating plate 72 changes with the ink quantity in the container 1. The through hole 1c is formed on the position which is faced to actuator 650, and the minimum constant amount of ink is secured in the through hole 1c. Therefore, the status of the end of ink end can be reliably detected by previously measuring the char-

acteristic of the vibration of the actuator 650, which is determined by the ink quantity secured in the through hole 1c.

[0147] Fig. 29 shows other embodiment of the through hole 1c. In each of Fig. 29(A), (B), and (C), the left hand side of the figure shows the status that there is no ink K in the through hole 1c, and the right hand side of the figure shows the status that ink K is remained in the through hole 1c. In the embodiment of Fig. 28, the side face of the through hole 1c is formed as the vertical wall. In Fig. 29(A), the side face 1d of the through hole 1c is slanted in vertical direction and opens with expanding to the outside. In Fig. 29(B), a stepped portion 1e and 1f are formed on the side face of the through hole 1c. The stepped portion 1f, which is provided above the stepped portion 1e, is wider than the stepped portion 1e. In Fig. 29(C), the through hole 1c has a groove 1g that extends to the direction in which ink is easily discharged, that is, the direction to a ink supply port 2.

[0148] According to the shape of the through hole 1c shown in Fig. 29(A) to (C), the quantity of ink K in the ink storing part can be reduced. Therefore, because the M'cav can be smaller than the M'max explained in Fig. 20 and Fig. 21, the vibration characteristic of the actuator 650 at the time of the ink end status can be greatly different with the vibration characteristic when enough quantity of ink K for printing is remained in the container 1, and thus the ink end status can be reliably detected.

[0149] Fig. 30 shows a slant view of the other embodiment of the actuator. The actuator 660 has packing 76 on the outside of the base plate, which constitutes the actuator 660, or the through hole 1c of a mounting plate 72. Caulking holes 77 are formed on the outskirts of the actuator 660. The actuator 660 is fixed to the container 1 through the caulking hole 77 with caulking. Fig. 31(A) and (B) is a slant view of the further other embodiment of the actuator. In this embodiment, the actuator 670 comprises a concave part forming base plate 80 and a piezoelectric element 82. The concave part 81 is formed on the one side of the face of the concave part forming base plate 80 by the technique such as etching, and piezoelectric element 82 is mounted on the other side of the face of the concave part forming base plate 80. The bottom portion of the concave part 81 operates as a vibrating region within the concave part forming base plate 80. Therefore, the vibrating region of the actuator 670 is determined by the periphery of the concave part 81. Furthermore, the actuator 670 has the similar structure with the structure of the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 20, in which the base plate 178 and the vibrating plate 176 is formed as one body. Therefore, the manufacturing process during the manufacturing an ink cartridge can be reduced, and the cost for manufacturing an ink cartridge also can be reduced. The actuator 670 has a size which can be embedded into the through hole 1c provided on the container 1. By this embedding process, the concave part 81 can operates as the cavity. The actuator 106 shown in Fig. 20 can be formed to be embedded into through hole 1c as actuator 670 shown in Fig. 31.

[0150] Fig. 32 shows a slant view of the configuration that forms the actuator 106 in one body as a mounting module 100. The module 100 is mounted on the predetermined position of the container 1 of an ink cartridge. The module 100 is constituted to detect the ink consumption status in the container 1 by detecting at least the change of acoustic impedance of the ink liquid. The module 100 of the present embodiment has a liquid container mounting member 101 for mounting the actuator 106 to the container 1. The liquid container mounting member 101 has a structure which mounts a cylindrical part 116 that contains the actuator 106 which oscillates by the driving signal on a base mount 102, the plan of which is substantially rectangular. Because the module 100 is constructed so that the actuator 106 of the module 100 can not be contact from outside when the module 100 is mounted on the ink cartridge, the actuator 106 can be protected from outside contact. The top side of the edge of the cylindrical part 116 is chamfered so that the cylindrical part 116 can be easily fit into the hole which is formed in the ink cartridge.

[0151] Fig. 33 shows an exploded view of the module 100 shown in Fig. 32 to show the structure of the module 100. The module 100 includes a liquid container mounting member 101 made from a resin and a piezoelectric device mounting member 105 which has a plate 110 and a concave part 113. Furthermore, the module 100 has a lead wire 104a and 104b, actuator 106, and a film 108. Preferably, the plate 110 is made from a material which is difficult to be rust such as stainless or stainless alloy. The opening 114 is formed on the central part of the cylindrical part 116 and the base mount 102 which are included in the liquid container mounting member 101 so that the cylindrical part 116 and the base mount 102 can contain the lead wire 104a and 104b. The concave part 113 is formed on the central part of the cylindrical part 116 and the base mount 102 so that the cylindrical part 116 and the base mount 102 can contain the actuator 106, the film 108, and the plate 110. The actuator 106 is connected to the plate 110 through the film 108, and the plate 110 and the actuator 106 are fixed to the liquid container mounting member 101. Therefore, the lead wire 104a and 104b, the actuator 106, the film 108 and the plate 110 are mounted on the liquid container mounting member 101 as one body. Each of the lead wire 104a and 104b transfer a driving signal to piezoelectric layer by coupling with the upper electrode and the lower electrode 166 of the actuator 106, and also transfer the signal of resonant frequency detected by the actuator 106 to recording apparatus. The actuator 106 oscillates temporally based on the driving signal transferred from the lead wire 104a and 104b. The actuator 106 vibrates residually after the oscillation and generates a counter electromotive force by the residual vibration. By detecting the vibrating period of the waveform of the counter electromotive force, the resonant frequency corresponding to the consumption status of the liquid in the liquid container can be detected. The film 108 bonds the actuator 106 and the plate 110 to seal the actuator 106. The film 108 is preferably formed by such as polyolefin and bonded to the actuator 106 and the plate 110 by heat sealing. By bonding the actuator 106 and

the plate 110 with the film 108 face with face, the unevenness of the bonding on location decreases, and thus the portion other than the vibrating plate does not vibrate. Therefore, the change of the resonant frequency before and after bonding the actuator 106 to plate 110 is small.

[0152] The plate 110 is circular shape, and the opening 114 of the base mount 102 is formed in cylindrical shape.

5 The actuator 106 and the film 108 are formed in rectangular shape. The lead wire 104, the actuator 106, the film 108, and the plate 110 can be attached to and removed from the base mount 102. Each of the base mount 102, the lead wire 104, the actuator 106, the film 108, and the plate 110 is arranged symmetric with respect to the central axis of the module 100. Furthermore, each of the centers of the base mount 102, the actuator 106, the film 108, and the plate 110 is arranged substantially on the central axis of the module 100.

10 **[0153]** The opening 114 of the base mount 102 is formed such that the area of the opening 114 is larger than the area of the vibrating region of the actuator 106. The through hole 112 is formed on the center of the plate 110 where the vibrating section of the actuator 106 faces. As shown in Fig. 20 and Fig. 21, the cavity 162 is formed on the actuator 106, and both of the through hole 112 and the cavity 162 forms ink storing part. The thickness of the plate 110 is prefer-15 ably smaller than diameter of the through hole 112 to reduce the influence of the residual ink. For example, the depth of the through hole 112 is preferably smaller than one third of the diameter of the through hole 112. The shape of the through hole 112 is substantially true circle and symmetric with respect to the central axis of the module 100. Furthermore, the area of the through hole 112 is larger than the area of opening of the cavity 162 of the actuator 106. The periphery of the shape of the cross-section of the through hole 112 can be tapered shape of stepped shape. The mod-20 ule 100 is mounted on the side, top, or bottom of the container 1 such that the through hole 112 faces to the inside of the container 1. When the ink is consumed, and the ink around the actuator 106 is exhausted, the resonant frequency of the actuator 106 greatly changes. The change of the ink level can thus be detected.

25 **[0154]** Fig.34 shows the slant view of the other embodiments of the module. The piezoelectric device mounting member 405 is formed on the liquid container mounting member 101 in the module 400 of the present embodiment. The cylindrical part 403, which has a cylindrical shape, is formed on the base mount 102, which has a square shaped plan, the edges of which are rounded, in the liquid container mounting member 401. Furthermore, the piezoelectric apparatus mounting member 405 includes a board shaped element 405, which is set up on the cylindrical part 403, and a concave part 413. The actuator 106 is arranged on the concave part 413 provided on the side face of the board shaped element 406. The top end of the board shaped element 406 is chamfered in predetermined angle so that the board shaped element is easy to fit into hole formed on the ink cartridge when mounting the actuator 106 to ink car-30 tridge.

35 **[0155]** Fig. 35 shows an exploded view of the module 400 shown in Fig. 34 to show the structure of the module 400. As the module 100 shown in Fig. 32, the module 400 includes a liquid container mounting member 401 and a piezoelectric device mounting member 405. The liquid container mounting member 401 has the base mount 402 and the cylindrical part 403, and the piezoelectric device mounting member 405 has the board shaped element 406 and the concave part 413. The actuator 106 is connected to the plate 410 and fixed to the concave part 413. The module 400 has a lead wire 404a and 404b, actuator 106, and a film 408.

40 **[0156]** According to the present embodiment, the plate 410 is rectangular shape, and the opening 414 provided on the board shaped element 406 is formed in rectangular shape. The lead wire 404a and 404b, the actuator 106, the film 408, and the plate 410 can be attached to and removed from the base mount 402. Each of the actuator 106, the film 408, and the plate 410 is arranged symmetric with respect to the central axis which is extended to perpendicular direc-45 tion to the plan of opening 414 and also pass through the center of opening 414. Furthermore, each of the centers of the actuator 106, the film 408, and the plate 410 is arranged substantially on the central axis of the opening 414.

50 **[0157]** The through hole 412 provided on the center of the plate 410 is formed such that the area of the through hole 412 is larger than the area of the opening of the cavity 162 of the actuator 106. The cavity 162 of the actuator 106 and the through hole 412 together forms ink storing part. The thickness of the plate 410 is preferably smaller than diameter of the through hole 412. For example, the thickness of the plate 410 is smaller than one third of the diameter of the through hole 412. The shape of the through hole 412 is substantially true circle and symmetric with respect to the central axis of the module 400. The shape of the cross-section of the periphery of the through hole 412 can be tapered shape or stepped shape. The module 400 can be mounted on the bottom of the container 1 such that the through hole 412 is arranged inside of the container 1. Because the actuator 106 is arranged inside the container 1 such that the actuator 106 extends in the vertical direction, the setting of the timing of the ink end can be easily changed by changing the height of the mounting position of the actuator 106 in the container 1 by changing the height of the base mount 402.

55 **[0158]** Fig.36 shows the further other embodiment of the module. As the module 100 shown in Fig. 32, the module 500 of Fig. 36 includes a liquid container mounting member 501 which has a base mount 502 and a cylindrical part 503. Furthermore, the module 500 further has a lead wire 504a and 504b, actuator 106, a film 508, and a plate 510. The opening 514 is formed on the center of the base mount 502, which is included in the liquid container mounting member 501, so that the base mount 502 can contain the lead wire 504a and 504b. The concave part 513 is formed on the cylindrical part 503 so that the cylindrical part 503 can contain the actuator 106, the film 508, and the plate 510. The actuator

106 is fixed to the piezoelectric device mounting member 505 through the plate 510. Therefore, the lead wire 504a and 504b, the actuator 106, the film 508, and the plate 510 are mounted on the liquid container mounting member 501 as one body. The cylindrical part 503, the top face of which is slanted in vertical direction, is formed on the base mount which has a square shaped plan and the edges of which are rounded. The actuator 106 is arranged on the concave part 513 which is provided on the top surface of the cylindrical part 503 that is slanted in vertical direction.

[0159] The top end of the module 500 is slanted, and the actuator 106 is mounted on this slanted surface. Therefore, if the module 500 is mounted on the bottom or the side of the container 1, the actuator 106 slants in the vertical direction of the container 1. The slanting angle of the top end of the module 500 is substantially between 30 degree and 60 degree with considering the detecting performance.

[0160] The module 500 is mounted on the bottom or the side of the container 1 so that the actuator 106 can be arranged inside the container 1. When the module 500 is mounted on the side of the container 1, the actuator 106 is mounted on the container 1 such that the actuator 106 faces the upside, downside, or side of the container 1 with slanting. When the module 500 is mounted on the bottom of the container 1, the actuator 106 is preferable to be mounted on the container 1 such that the actuator 106 faces to the ink supply port side of the container 1 with slanting.

[0161] Fig. 37 shows a cross-sectional view around the bottom of the container 1 when the module 100 shown in Fig. 32 is mounted on the container 1. The module 100 is mounted on the container 1 so that the module 100 penetrates through the side wall of the container 1. The O-ring 365 is provided on the connection face of between the side wall of the container 1 and the module 100 to seal between the module 100 and the container 1. The module 100 is preferable to include the cylindrical part as explained in Fig. 32 so that the module 100 can be sealed by the O-ring. By inserting the top end of the module 100 inside the container 1, ink in the container 1 contacts with the actuator 106 through the through hole 112 of the plate 110. Because the resonant frequency of the residual vibration of the actuator 106 is different depends on whether the circumference of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 is liquid or gas, the ink consumption status can be detected using the module 100. Furthermore, not only the module 100 can be mounted on the container 1 and detect the existence of ink, but also the module 400 shown in Fig. 34, module 500 shown in Fig. 36, or the module 700A and 700B shown in Fig. 38, and a mold structure 600 can be mounted on the container 1 and detect the existence of the ink.

[0162] Fig. 38(A) shows the cross section of the ink container when mounting module 700B on the container 1. The present embodiment uses a module 700B as an example of a mounting structure.

[0163] The actuator 106 includes the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, the lower electrode 166, the vibrating plate 176, and the mounting plate 350. The vibrating plate 176 is formed on the mounting plate 350, and the lower electrode 166 is formed on the vibrating plate 176. The piezoelectric layer 160 is formed on the top face of the lower electrode 166, and the upper electrode 164 is formed on the top face of the piezoelectric layer 160. Therefore, the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 is formed by sandwiching the main portion of the piezoelectric layer 160 by the main portion of the upper electrode 164 and the lower electrode 166 from top and bottom. The circular portion, which is a main portion of each of the piezoelectric layer 160, the upper electrode 164, and the lower electrode 166, forms a piezoelectric element. The piezoelectric element is formed on the vibrating plate 176. The vibrating region of the piezoelectric element and the vibrating plate 176 constitutes the vibrating section, on which the actuator 106 actuates vibrates.

[0164] The module 700B is mounted on the container 1 such that the liquid container mounting member 360 protrude into the inside of the A through hole 370 is formed in the mounting plate 350, and the through hole 370 faces to the vibrating section of the actuator 106. Furthermore, a hole 382 is formed on the bottom wall of the module 700B, and a piezoelectric device mounting member 363 is formed. The actuator 106 is arranged to close the one of the face of the hole 382. Therefore, ink contacts with the vibrating plate 176 through the hole 382 of the piezoelectric device mounting member 363 and the through hole 370 of the mounting plate 350. The hole 382 of the piezoelectric device mounting member 363 and the through hole 370 of the mounting plate 350 together forms an ink storing part. The piezoelectric device mounting member 363 and the actuator 106 are fixed by the mounting plate 350 and the film material. The sealing structure 372 is provided on the connection part of the liquid container mounting member 360 and the container 1. The sealing structure 372 can be formed by the plastic material such as synthetic resin or O-ring. In Fig. 38(A), the module 700B and the container 1 is separate body, however, the piezoelectric device mounting member can be constituted by a part of the container 1 as shown in Fig. 38(B).

[0165] There is possibility that the actuator 106 malfunctions by the contact of the ink which is dropped from a top face or a side face of the container 1 with the actuator 106, the ink of which is attached to the top face or the side face of the container 1 when the ink cartridge is shaken. However, because the liquid container mounting member 360 of the module 700B protrudes into the inside of the container 1, the actuator 106 does not malfunction by the ink dropped from the top face or the side face of the container 1.

[0166] Fig. 38(B) shows the cross section of the ink container when mounting actuator 106 on the container 1. A protecting member 361 is mounted on the container 1 separately with the actuator 106 in the ink cartridge of the embodiment shown in Fig. 38(B). Therefore, the protecting member 361 and the actuator 106 is not one body as a module, and

the protecting member 361 thus can protect the actuator 106 not to be contact by the user. A hole 380 which is provide on the front face of the actuator 106 is arranged on the side wall of the container 1. A through hole 370 is provided on the mounting plate 350. Furthermore, a hole 380 is formed on the side wall of the container 1. Therefore, ink contacts with the vibrating plate 176 through the hole 380 of the container 1 and the through hole 370 of the mounting plate 350.

5 The hole 380 of the container land the through hole 370 of the mounting plate 350 together forms ink storing part. Moreover, because the actuator 106 is protected by the protecting member 361, the actuator 106 can be protected form the outside contact. The base plate 178 shown in Fig. 20 can be used instead of the mounting plate 350 in the embodiment shown in Fig. 38(A) and (B).

10 [0167] Fig. 38(C) shows an embodiment that comprises a mold structure 600 which includes the actuator 106. In the present embodiment, a mold structure 600 is used as one example of the mounting structure. The mold structure 600 has the actuator 106 and a mold member 364. The actuator 106 and the mold member 364 are formed in one body. The mold member 364 is formed by a plastic material such as silicon resin. The mold member 364 includes a lead wire 362 in its inside. The mold member 364 is formed so that the mold member 364 has two legs extended from the actuator 106. The end of the two legs of the mold member 364 are formed in a shape of hemisphere to liquid tightly fix the mold member 364 with container 1. The mold member 364 is mounted on the container 1 such that the actuator 106 protrudes into the inside of the container 1, and the vibrating section of the actuator 106 contacts with ink inside the container 1. The upper electrode 164, the piezoelectric layer 160, and the lower electrode 166 of the actuator 106 are protected from ink by the mold member 364.

15 [0168] Because the mold structure 600 shown in Fig. 38 does not need the sealing structure 372 between the mold member 364 and the container 1, the leaking of ink from the container 1 can be reduced. Moreover, because the mold structure 600 has a form that the mold structure 600 does not protrude from the outside of the container 1, the mold structure 600 can protect the actuator 106 from the outside contact. There is possibility that the actuator 106 malfunctions by the contact of the ink which is dropped from a top face or a side face of the container 1 with the actuator 106, the ink of which is attached to the top face or the side face of the container 1 when the ink cartridge is shaken. Because 20 the mold member 364 of the mold structure 600 protrudes into the inside of the container 1, the actuator 106 does not malfunction by the ink dropped from the top face or the side face of the container 1.

25 [0169] Fig. 39 shows an embodiment of an ink cartridge and an ink jet recording apparatus which uses the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 20. A plurality of ink cartridges 180 is mounted on the ink jet recording apparatus which has a plurality of ink introducing members 182 and a holder 184 each corresponding to the each of ink cartridge 180, respectively. 30 Each of the plurality of ink cartridges 180 contains different types of ink, for example, different color of ink. The actuator 106, which detects at least acoustic impedance, is mounted on the each of bottom of the plurality of ink cartridge 180. The residual quantity of ink in the ink cartridge 180 can be detected by mounting the actuator 106 on the ink cartridge 180.

35 [0170] Fig. 40 shows a detail around the head member of the ink jet recording apparatus. The ink jet recording apparatus has an ink introducing member 182, a holder 184, a head plate 186, and a nozzle plate 188. A plurality of nozzle 190, which jet out ink, is formed on the nozzle plate 188. The ink introducing member 182 has an air supply hole 181 and an ink introducing inlet 183. The air supply hole 181 supplies air to the ink cartridge 180. The ink introducing inlet 183 introduces ink from the ink cartridge 180. The ink cartridge 180 has an air introducing inlet 185 and an ink supply port 187. The air introducing inlet 185 introduces air from the air supply hole 181 of the ink introducing member 182. 40 The ink supply port 187 supplies ink to the ink introducing inlet 183 of the ink introducing member 182. By introducing air from the ink introducing member 182 to the ink cartridge 180, the ink cartridge 180 accelerates the supply of ink from the ink cartridge 180 to the ink introducing member 182. The holder 184 communicates ink supplied from the ink cartridge 180 through the ink introducing member 182 to the head plate 186.

45 [0171] Fig. 41 shows other embodiment of the ink cartridge 180 shown in Fig. 40. The actuator 106 is mounted on the bottom face 194a, which is formed to be slanted in vertical direction, of the ink cartridge 180A shown in the Fig. 41(A). A wave preventing wall 192 is provided on the position where has the predetermined height from the bottom face of the inside the ink container 194 and also faces to the actuator 106 inside the ink container 194 of the ink cartridge 180. Because the actuator 106 is mounted on the ink container 194 slanted in vertical direction, the drainage of ink can be improved.

50 [0172] A gap, which is filled with ink, is formed between the actuator 106 and the wave preventing wall 192. The space between the wave preventing wall 192 and the actuator 106 has a space such that the space does not hold ink by capillary force. When the ink container 194 is rolled, ink wave is generated inside the ink container 194 by the rolling, and there is possibility that the actuator 106 malfunctions by detecting gas or an air bubble caused by the shock of the ink wave. By providing the wave preventing wall 192, ink wave around the actuator 106 can be prevented so that the malfunction of the actuator 106 can be prevented.

55 [0173] The actuator 106 of the ink cartridge 180B shown in Fig. 41 is mounted on the side wall of the supply port of the ink container 194. The actuator 106 can be mounted on the side wall or bottom face of the ink container 194 if the actuator 106 is mounted nearby the ink supply port 187. The actuator 106 is preferably mounted on the center of

the width direction of the ink container 194. Because ink is supplied to the outside through the ink supply port 187, ink and actuator 106 reliably contacts until the timing of the ink near end by providing the actuator 106 nearby the ink supply port 187. Therefore, the actuator 106 can reliably detect the timing of the ink near end.

[0174] Furthermore, by providing the actuator 106 nearby the ink supply port 187, the setting position of the actuator 106 to the connection point on the carriage on the ink container becomes reliable during the mounting of the ink container on the cartridge holder of the carriage. It is because the reliability of coupling between the ink supply port with the ink supply needle is most important during the coupling of the ink container and the carriage. If there is even a small gap, the tip of the ink supply needle will be hurt or a sealing structure such as O-ring will be damaged so that the ink will be leaked. To prevent this kind of problems, the ink jet printer usually has a special structure that can accurately positioning the ink container during the mounting of the ink container on the carriage. Therefore, the positioning of the actuator 106 becomes reliable by arranging the actuator nearby the ink supply port. Furthermore, the actuator 106 can be further reliably positioned by mounting the actuator 106 at the center of the width direction of the ink container 194. It is because the rolling is the smallest when the ink container rolls along an axis, the center of which is center line of the width direction, during the mounting of the ink container on the holder.

[0175] Fig. 42 shows further other embodiment of the ink cartridge 180. Fig. 42(A) shows a cross section of an ink cartridge 180C, and Fig. 42(B) shows a cross section which enlarges the side wall 194b of an ink cartridge 180C shown in Fig. 42(A). Fig. 42(C) shows perspective view from the front of the side wall 194b of the ink cartridge 180C. The semiconductor memory device 7 and the actuator 106 are formed on the same circuit board 610 in the ink cartridge 180C. As shown in Fig. 42(B) and (C), the semiconductor memory device 7 is formed on the upper side of the circuit board 610, and the actuator 106 is formed on the lower side of the semiconductor memory device 7 on the same circuit board 610. A different-type O-ring 614 is mounted on the side wall 194b such that the different-type O-ring 614 surrounds the actuator 106. A plurality of caulking part 616 is formed on the side wall 194b to couple the circuit board 610 with the ink container 194. By coupling the circuit board 610 with the ink container 194 using the caulking part 616 and pushing the different-type O-ring 614 to the circuit board 610, the vibrating region of the actuator 106 can contacts with ink, and at the same time, the inside of the ink cartridge is sealed from outside of the ink cartridge.

[0176] A terminals 612 are formed on the semiconductor memory device 7 and around the semiconductor memory device 7. The terminal 612 transfer the signal between the semiconductor memory device 7 and outside the ink jet recording apparatus. The semiconductor memory device 7 can be constituted by the semiconductor memory which can be rewritten such as EEPROM. Because the semiconductor memory device 7 and the actuator 106 are formed on the same circuit board 610, the mounting process can be finished at one time during mounting the semiconductor memory device 7 and the actuator 106 on the ink cartridge 180C. Moreover, the working process during the manufacturing of the ink cartridge 180C and the recycling of the ink cartridge 180C can be simplified. Furthermore, the manufacturing cost of the ink cartridge 180C can be reduced because the numbers of the parts can be reduced.

[0177] The actuator 106 detects the ink consumption status inside the ink container 194. The semiconductor memory device 7 stores the information of ink such as residual quantity of ink detected by the actuator 106. That is, the semiconductor memory device 7 stores the information related to the characteristic parameter such as the characteristic of ink and the ink cartridge used for the actuator 106 when detecting the ink consumption status. The semiconductor memory device 7 previously stores the resonant frequency of when ink inside the ink container 194 is full, that is, when ink is filled in the ink container 194 sufficiently, or when ink in the ink container 194 is end, that is, ink in the ink container 194 is consumed, as one of the characteristic parameter. The resonant frequency when the ink inside the ink container 194 is full status or end status can be stored when the ink container is mounted on the ink jet recording apparatus for the first time. Moreover, the resonant frequency when the ink inside the ink container 194 is full status or end status can be stored during the manufacturing of the ink container 194. Because the unevenness of the detection of the residual quantity of ink can be compensated by storing the resonant frequency when the ink inside the ink container 194 is full status or end status in the semiconductor memory device 7 previously and reading out the data of the resonant frequency at the ink jet recording apparatus side, it can be accurately detected that the residual quantity of ink is decreased to the reference value.

[0178] Fig. 43 shows further other embodiment of the ink cartridge 180. A plurality of actuators 106 is mounted on the side wall 194b of the ink container 194 in the ink cartridge 180D shown in Fig. 43(A). It is preferable to use the plurality of the actuators 106 which is formed in one body as shown in Fig. 24 for these plurality of actuators 106. The plurality of actuators 106 is arranged on the side wall 194b with interval in vertical direction. By arranging the plurality of actuators 106 on the side wall 194b with interval in vertical direction, the residual quantity of ink can be detected step by step.

[0179] The ink cartridge 180E shown in Fig. 43(B) mounts a actuator 606 which is long in vertical direction on the side wall 194b of the ink container 194. The change of the residual quantity of ink inside the ink container 194 can be detected continuously by the actuator 606 which is long in vertical direction. The length of the actuator 606 is preferably longer than the half of the height of the side wall 194b. In Fig. 43(B), the actuator 606 has the length from the substantially from the top end to the bottom end of the side wall 194b.

[0180] The ink cartridge 180F shown in Fig. 43(C) mounts a plurality of actuators 106 on the side wall 194b of the ink container 194 as the ink cartridge 180D shown in Fig. 43(A). The ink cartridge 180F further comprises the wave preventing wall 192, which is long in vertical direction, along the side wall 194b with predetermined space with the side wall 194b such that the wave preventing wall 192 faces directly to the plurality of actuators 106. It is preferable to use the plurality of the actuators 106 which is formed in one body as shown in Fig. 24 for these plurality of actuators 106. A gap which is filled with ink is formed between the actuator 106 and the wave preventing wall 192. Moreover, the gap between the wave preventing wall 192 and the actuator 106 has a space such that the gap does not hold ink by capillary force. When the ink container 194 is rolled, ink wave is generated inside the ink container 194 by the rolling, and there is possibility that the actuator 106 malfunctions by detecting gas or an air bubble caused by the shock of the ink wave. By providing the wave preventing wall 192, ink wave around the actuator 106 can be prevented so that the malfunction of the actuator 106 can be prevented. The wave preventing wall 192 also prevents the air bubble generated by the rolling of ink to enter to the actuator 106.

[0181] Fig. 45 shows further other embodiment of the ink cartridge 180. The ink cartridge 180G shown in Fig. 45(A) has a plurality of partition walls 212, each of which extends downward from the top face 194c of the ink container 194. Because each of lower end of the partition walls 212 and the bottom face of the ink container 194 has a predetermined gap, the bottom part of the ink container 194 communicates with each other. The ink cartridge 180G has a plurality of containing chambers 213 divided by the each of plurality of partition walls 212. The bottom part of the plurality of the containing chambers 213 communicates with each other. In each of the plurality of the containing chamber 213, the actuator 106 is mounted on the top face 194c of the ink container 194. It is preferable to use the plurality of the actuators 106 which is formed in one body as shown in Fig. 24 for these plurality of actuators 106. The actuator 106 is arranged on substantially center of the top face 194c of the containing chamber 213 of the ink container 194. The volume of the containing chamber 213 is arranged such that the volume of the containing chamber 213 of the ink supply port 187 is the largest, and the volume of the containing chamber 213 gradually decreases as the distance from the ink supply port 187 increases to the inner part of the ink cartridge 180G.

[0182] Therefore, the space between each of the actuator 106 is widest at the ink supply port 187 side and becomes narrower as the distance from the ink supply port 187 increases to the inner part of the ink cartridge 180G. Because ink is drained from the ink supply port 187, and air enters from the air introducing inlet 185, ink is consumed from the containing chamber 213 of the ink supply port 187 side to the containing chamber 213 of the inner part of the ink cartridge 180G. For example, the ink in the containing chamber 213 which is most near to the ink supply port 187 is consumed, and during the ink level of the containing chamber 213 which is most near to the ink supply port 187 decreases, the other containing chamber 213 are filled with ink. When the ink in the containing chamber 213 which is most near to the ink supply port 187 is consumed totally, air enters to the containing chamber 213 which is second by counted from the ink supply port 187, then the ink in the second containing chamber 213 is beginning to be consumed so that the ink level of the second containing chamber 213 begin to decrease. At this time, ink is filled in the containing chamber 213 which is third or more than third by counted from the ink supply port 187. In this way, ink is consumed from the containing chamber 213 which is most near to the ink supply port 187 to the containing chamber 213 which is far from the ink supply port 187 in order.

[0183] As shown above, because the actuator 106 is arranged on the top face 194c of the ink container 194 with interval for each of the containing chamber 213, the actuator 106 can detect the decrease of the ink quantity step by step. Furthermore, because the volume of the containing chamber 213 decreases from the ink supply port 187 to the inner part of the containing chamber 213 gradually, the time interval when the actuator 106 detects the decrease of the ink quantity gradually decreases. Therefore, the frequency of the ink quantity detection can be increased as the ink end is drawing near.

[0184] The ink cartridge 180H shown in Fig. 44(B) has one partition wall 212 which extends downward from the top face 194c of the ink container 194. Because lower end of the partition walls 212 and the bottom face of the ink container 194 have a predetermined space, the bottom part of the ink container 194 communicates with each other. The ink cartridge 180H has two containing chambers 213a and 213b divided by the partition wall 212. The bottom part of the containing chambers 213a and 213b communicates with each other. The volume of the containing chamber 213a of the ink supply port 187 side is larger than the volume of the containing chamber 213b which is located in a inner part of the ink cartridge 180H far from the ink supply port 187. The volume of the containing chamber 213b is preferably smaller than the half of the volume of the containing chamber 213a.

[0185] The actuator 106 is mounted on the top face 194c of the containing chamber 213B. Furthermore, a buffer 214, that is a groove for catching the air bubble which enters to the ink cartridge 180H during manufacturing of the ink cartridge 180H, is formed on the containing chamber 213b. In Fig. 44(B), the buffer 214 is formed as a groove extended upward from the side wall 194b of the ink container 194. Because the buffer 214 catches the air bubble enters inside the containing chamber 213b, the malfunction of the actuator 106 by detecting an ink end when catching the air bubble can be prevented. Furthermore, by providing actuator 106 on the top face 194c of the containing chamber 213b, ink can be completely consumed by compensating the ink quantity, which is measured from the detection of the ink end until

the complete consumption of ink, with the corresponding ink consumption status of the containing chamber 213a calculated from the dot counter. Furthermore, by adjusting the volume of the containing chamber 213b by changing the length or the interval of the partition wall 212, the ink quantity which can be consumed after the detection of the ink end can be changed.

5 [0186] The ink cartridge 180I shown in Fig. 44(C) fills a porous member 216 in the containing chamber 213b of the ink cartridge 180H shown in Fig. 44(B). The porous member 216 is filled inside the containing chamber 213b from the top face to the bottom face of the porous member 216b. The porous member 216 contacts with the actuator 106. There is a possibility that the actuator 106 malfunctions by the entering of the air bubble inside the containing chamber 213b when the ink container fall down or when the containing chamber 213b moves back and forth with the carriage. If the
10 porous member 216 is provided on the containing chamber 213b, the porous member 216 captures air to prevent entering of air into the actuator 106. Furthermore, because the porous member 216 holds ink, the porous member 216 can prevent the actuator 106 to malfunction as detecting the ink end status as ink exist status which is caused by attaching of the ink on the actuator 106 when the ink container shakes. The porous member 216 is preferable to be provided in the containing chamber 213 having a smallest volume. Furthermore, by providing actuator 106 on the top face 194c of
15 the containing chamber 213b, ink can be consumed to the end by compensating the ink quantity which is measured from the detection of the ink end until the complete consumption of ink. Furthermore, The ink quantity which can be consumed after the detection of the ink near end can be changed by adjusting the volume of the containing chamber 213b by changing the length and interval of the partition wall 212.

20 [0187] Fig. 44(D) shows an ink cartridge 180J, the porous member 216 of which is constituted by two kinds of porous members 216A and 216B having a different hole diameter with each other. The porous member 216A is located on the upper side of the porous member 216B. The hole diameter of the porous member 216A which is located on the upper side of the containing chamber 213b is larger than the hole diameter of the porous member 216B which is located on the lower side of the containing chamber 213B. The porous member 216A can be formed by the member which has a lower affinity for liquid than the affinity for liquid of the member which forms the porous member 216B. Because the
25 capillary force of the porous member 216B, which has small hole diameter, is larger than the capillary force of the porous member 216A, which has large hole diameter, the ink in the containing chamber 213b is collected to the porous member 216B located on the lower side of the containing chamber 213B and held by the porous member 216B. Therefore, once the air reaches to the actuator 106, and the actuator 106 detects the non-ink status, ink does not reaches to the actuator 106 again so that the actuator 106 does not malfunction to detect the ink exist status. Furthermore,
30 because the porous member 216B which is far from the actuator 106 absorbs ink, the drainage of ink around the actuator 106 improves, and the quantity of change of the acoustic impedance during the detection of the ink existence increases. Moreover, by providing the actuator 106 on the top face 194c of the containing chamber 213b, ink can be consumed to the end by compensating the ink quantity which is measured from the detection of the ink near end until
35 the complete consumption of ink. Furthermore, The ink quantity which can be consumed after the detection of the ink near end can be changed by adjusting the volume of the containing chamber 213b by changing the length and interval of the partition wall 212.

40 [0188] Fig. 45 shows a cross section of an ink cartridge 180K which is further other embodiment of the ink cartridge 180I shown in Fig. 44(C). The porous member 216 in the ink cartridge 180K shown in Fig. 45 is designed such that the area of the cross section on the horizontal plane of the lower part of the porous member 216 is compressed to be decreases gradually to the direction to the bottom face of the ink container 194. Therefore, the hole diameter of the porous member 216 decreases gradually to the direction to the bottom face of the ink container 194. Ink cartridge 180K shown in Fig. 45(A) has a rib which is provided on the side wall of the ink container 194 to compress the lower part of the porous member 216 to reduce the hole diameter of the lower part of the porous member 216. Because the hole diameter of the lower part of the porous member 216 reduced by the compression, ink is collected and held by the lower
45 part of the porous member 216. Because the lower part of the porous member 216 which is far from the actuator 106 absorbs ink, the drainage of ink around the actuator 106 improves, and the quantity of change of the acoustic impedance during the detection of the ink existence increases. Therefore, the error, of which the actuator 106 detects the non ink status as the ink exist status by the attaching of ink on the actuator 106 mounted on the top face of the ink cartridge 180K by rolling of ink, can be prevented

50 [0189] In the ink cartridge 180L shown in Fig. 45(B) and Fig. 45(C), to compress to decrease the area of the cross section on the horizontal plane of the lower part of the porous member 216 gradually to the direction to the bottom face of the ink container 194, the area of the cross section on the horizontal plane of the containing chamber gradually decreases to the direction to the bottom face of the ink container 194. Because the hole diameter of the lower part of the porous member 216 reduced by the compression, ink is collected and held by the lower part of the porous member
55 216. Because the lower part of the porous member 216B which is far from the actuator 106 absorbs ink, the drainage of ink around the actuator 106 improves, and the quantity of change of the acoustic impedance during the detection of the ink existence increases. Therefore, the error, of which the actuator 106 detects the non ink status as the ink exist status by the attaching of ink on the actuator 106 mounted on the top face of the ink cartridge 180L by rolling of ink, can

be prevented

[0190] Fig. 46 shows other embodiment of the ink cartridge using the actuator 106. The ink cartridge 220A shown in Fig. 46(A) has a first partition wall 222 provided such that it extends downward from the top face of the ink cartridge 220A. Because there is a predetermined space between the lower end of the first partition wall 222 and the bottom face of the ink cartridge 220A, ink can flows into the ink supply port 230 through the bottom face of the ink cartridge 220A. A second partition wall 224 is formed such that the second partition wall 224 extends upward from the bottom face of the ink cartridge 220A on the more ink supply port 230 side of the first partition wall 222. Because there is a predetermined space between the upper end of the second partition wall 224 and the top face of the ink cartridge 220A, ink can flows into the ink supply port 230 through the top face of the ink cartridge 220A.

[0191] A first containing chamber 225a is formed on the inner part of the first partition wall 222, seen from the ink supply port 230, by the first partition wall 222. On the other hand, a second containing chamber 225b is formed on the front side of the second partition wall 224, seen from the ink supply port 230, by the second partition wall 224. The volume of the first containing chamber 225a is larger than the volume of the second containing chamber 225b. A capillary passage 227 is formed by providing a space, which can generate the capillary phenomenon, between the first partition wall 222 and the second partition wall 224. Therefore, the ink in the first containing chamber 225a is collected to the capillary passage 227 by the capillary force of the capillary passage 227. Therefore, the capillary passage 227 can prevent that the air or air bubble enters into the second containing chamber 225b. Furthermore, the ink level in the second containing chamber 225b can decrease steadily and gradually. Because the first containing chamber 225a is formed at more inner part of the second containing chamber 225b, seen from the ink supply port 230, the ink in the second containing chamber 225b is consumed after the ink in the first containing chamber 225a is consumed.

[0192] The actuator 106 is mounted on the side wall of the ink cartridge 220A of the ink supply port 230 side, that is, the side wall of the second containing chamber 225b of the ink supply port 230 side. The actuator 106 detects the ink consumption status inside the second containing chamber 225b. The residual quantity of ink at the timing closed to the ink near end can be detected stably by mounting the actuator 106 on the side wall of the second containing chamber 225b. Furthermore, by changing the height of the mounting position of the actuator 106 on the side wall of the second containing chamber 225b, the timing to determine which ink residual quantity as an ink end can be freely set. Because ink is sullied from the first containing chamber 225a to the second containing chamber 225b by the capillary passage 227, the actuator 106 does not influenced by the rolling of ink caused by the rolling of the ink cartridge 220A, and actuator 106 can thus reliably measure the ink residual quantity. Furthermore, because the capillary passage 227 holds ink, the capillary passage 227 can prevent ink to flow backward from the second containing chamber 225b to the first containing chamber 225a.

[0193] A check valve 228 is provided on the top face of the ink cartridge 220A. The leaking of ink outside of the ink cartridge 220A caused by the rolling of the ink cartridge 220A can be prevented by the check valve 228. Furthermore, the evaporation of ink from the ink cartridge 220A can be prevented by providing the check valve 228 on the top face of the ink cartridge 220A. If ink in the ink cartridge 220A is consumed, and negative pressure inside the ink cartridge 220A exceeds the pressure of the check valve 228, the check valve 228 opens and introduces air into the ink cartridge 220A. Then the check valve 228 closes to maintain the pressure inside the ink cartridge 220A to be stable.

[0194] Fig. 46(C) and (D) shows a detailed cross-section of the check valve 228. The check valve 228 shown in Fig. 46(C) has a valve 232 which includes flange 232a formed by rubber. An airhole 233, which communicates air between inside and outside of the ink cartridge 220, is provided on the ink cartridge 220 such that the airhole 233 faces to the flange 232a. The airhole 233 is opened and closed by the flange 232a. The check valve 228 opens the flange 232a inward the ink cartridge 220 when the negative pressure in the ink cartridge 220 exceeds the pressure of the check valve 228 by the decrease of ink inside the ink cartridge 220A, and thus the air outside the ink cartridge 220 is introduced into the ink cartridge 220. The check valve 228 shown in Fig. 46(D) has a valve 232 formed by rubber and a spring 235. If the negative pressure inside the ink cartridge 220 exceeds the pressure of the check valve 228, the valve 232 presses and opens the spring 235 to introduce the outside air into the ink cartridge 220 and then closes to maintain the negative pressure inside the ink cartridge 220 to be stable.

[0195] The ink cartridge 220B shown in Fig. 46(B) has a porous member 242 in the first containing chamber 225a instead of providing the check valve 228 on the ink cartridge 220A as shown in Fig. 46. The porous member 242 holds the ink inside the ink cartridge 220B and also prevents ink to be leaked outside of the ink cartridge 220B during the rolling of the ink cartridge 220B.

[0196] The embodiment that the actuator 106 is mounted on an ink cartridge or a carriage, in which the ink cartridge is a separate body with the carriage and mounted on the carriage, has been explained above. However, the actuator 106 can be mounted on the ink tank which is mounted on the ink jet recording apparatus together with a carriage and formed together with a carriage as one body. Furthermore, the actuator 106 can be mounted on the ink tank of the off-carriage type. The off-carriage type ink tank is a separate body with a carriage and supplies ink to carriage through such as tube. Moreover, the actuator of the present embodiment can be mounted on the ink cartridge 180 constituted so that a recording head and an ink container are formed as on body and possible to be exchanged.

[0197] Fig. 47 shows a cross sectional view of the ink container in the vicinity of a base face thereof at the time when the module 100 shown in Fig. 32 is mounted to the container 1. In contrast to Fig. 29, in Fig. 47 it is emphasized that a vibrating portion of the actuator 106 is of an elongated shape against the ink liquid surface. The module 100 is mounted in a manner such that it penetrates a side wall of the container 1. In a contact face between the side wall of the container 1 and the module 100, there is provided an O ring 365 so as to keep liquid-tightness between the module 100 and the container 1. In order to achieve sealing by the O ring, the module 100 is preferably equipped with a cylindrical portion described in Fig. 32. By inserting a tip of the module 100 inside the container 1, the ink inside the container comes in contact with the actuator 106 via a through hole 112 of a plate 110. Since the resonant frequency of the residual vibration of the actuator 106 differs depending on whether or not the periphery of the vibrating portion of the actuator is liquid or gas, the consumption state of ink can be detected by utilizing the module 100. A module used is not limited to the module 100, and whether or not the ink is present may be detected by mounting the module 400 shown in Fig. 34 or the module 500 shown in Fig. 36 to the container 1.

[0198] Fig. 48 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge according to the present embodiment where the ink cartridge is cut along a longitudinal or vertical direction. The packing ring 4 and valve body 6 are provided in the ink supply port 2. The packing 4 is engaged with the ink supply needle 32 communicating with the recording head 31 in a fluid-tight manner. The valve body 6 is constantly and elastically contacted to the packing ring 4 by means of the spring 5. When the ink supply needle 32 is inserted, the valve body 6 is pressed by the ink supply needle so as to open an ink passage. The container 1 includes a semiconductor memory means 7, in an upper portion thereof, which stores data related to the ink inside the ink cartridge.

[0199] The ink cartridge according to the present embodiment comprises a container 1 which houses the ink therein, an ink supply port 2 which supplies the ink, and an actuator 106 which continuously detects the consumption state of the liquid inside the container 1. The actuator 106 comprises an elongated member which extends in the vertical direction against the liquid surface of the liquid. Accompanied by forming the actuator 106 in the elongated shape, the vibrating portion of the actuator 106 is formed in the elongated form extending in the vertical direction against the liquid surface of the liquid inside the container.

[0200] Of a side wall of the container 1, in a supply port side wall 1010 where the ink supply port 2 is provided there is provided an elongating opening in the vertical direction with respect to the liquid surface of ink. The actuator 106 is so arranged that it is engaged with an opening provided in the supply port side wall 1010 in a fluid-tight manner. One end of the actuator 106 is positioned in the vicinity of the ink supply port 2. Other end of the actuator 106 is positioned in the vicinity of a boundary of the an top face 1020 positioned adjacent to the supply port side wall 1010 and in the upper direction with respect to the liquid surface of ink and the supply port side wall 1010. In the present embodiment, the actuator 106 is elongated from the vicinity of the supply port 2 to the top face 1020. The length of the actuator is preferably greater than a half of a distance from the ink supply port 2 to the top face 1020. However, there is no limit to the length of the actuator.

[0201] Fig. 49 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge cut in the longitudinal or vertical direction according to another embodiment. The packing ring 4 and valve body 6 are provided in the ink supply port 2. The packing 4 is engaged with the ink supply needle 32 communicating with the recording head 31 in a fluid-tight manner. The valve body 6 is constantly and elastically contacted to the packing ring 4 by means of the spring 5. When the ink supply needle 32 is inserted, the valve body 6 is pressed by the ink supply needle so as to open an ink passage. The container 1 includes a semiconductor memory means 7, in an upper portion thereof, which stores data related to the ink inside the ink cartridge.

[0202] The ink cartridge according to the present embodiment comprises a container 1 which houses the ink therein, an ink supply port 2 which supplies the ink, and an actuator 106 which continuously detects the consumption state of the liquid inside the container 1. The actuator 106 comprises an elongated member which extends in the vertical direction against the liquid surface of the liquid.

[0203] Of a side wall of the container 1, in a counter side wall 1030 located counter to the supply port side wall 1010 where the ink supply port 2 is provided there is provided an elongating opening in the vertical direction with respect to the liquid surface of ink. The actuator 106 is so arranged that it is engaged with an opening provided in the counter side wall 1030 in a fluid-tight manner. One end of the actuator 106 lies adjacent to the counter side wall 1030 and is positioned in the vicinity of a boundary of a bottom face 1a in a lower position with respect to the liquid surface of ink and the counter side wall 1030. Other end of the actuator 106 is positioned in the vicinity of a boundary of the top face 1020 positioned adjacent to the counter side wall 1030 and in the upper direction with respect to the liquid surface of ink and the counter side wall 1030. In the present embodiment, the actuator 106 is elongated from the vicinity of the bottom face 1a to the vicinity of the top face 1020. The length of the actuator is preferably greater than a half of a distance from the bottom face 1a to the top face 1020. However, there is no limit to the length of the actuator.

[0204] Though in Fig. 48 and Fig. 49 the actuator 106 is provided in either of the supply port side wall 1010 or the counter side wall 1030, the actuator 106 may be provided in both the supply port side wall 1010 and the counter side wall 1030.

[0205] Fig. 50 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge according to the present embodiment in the latitudinal direction or cross direction. In the present embodiment, of enclosing side walls 1020a and 1020b (not shown) which enclose between the supply port side wall and the counter side wall positioned counter thereto, the actuator 106 is arranged in the enclosing side wall 1020a. One end of the actuator 106 is positioned in the vicinity of a boundary between the bottom face 1a and enclosing side wall 1020a. Other end of the actuator 106 is provided in a position far up from a mid-point between the bottom face 1a and a top face 1020 positioned counter thereto. In the present embodiment, the actuator 106 extends from the vicinity of the bottom face 1a to a position farther a mid-point between the bottom face 1a and top face 1020. However, the length of the actuator 106 need not be specified. Thus, the actuator 106 may extend from the vicinity of the bottom face 1a to the vicinity of the top face 1020. However, the length of the actuator 106 is preferably greater than a half of a distance from the bottom face 1a to the top face 1020. The actuator 106 shown in Fig. 50 may be arranged in the side wall 1020b instead.

[0206] Moreover, though the actuator 106 shown in Fig. 50 is provided in one of enclosing side walls, that is, in the enclosing side wall 1020a, the actuators may be provided in both the enclosing wall 1020a and the enclosing side wall 1020b.

[0207] Moreover, referring to Fig. 48 and Fig. 50, the ink supply port 2 is arranged so as to supply ink K in the horizontal direction with respect to the liquid surface of ink K. However, the direction of the ink supply port 2 is not limited thereto. Thus, the ink supply port 2 may be arranged so as to supply ink K in the vertical direction with respect to the liquid surface of ink K.

[0208] Fig. 51 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge when the ink supply port 2 is arranged so as to supply ink K in the vertical position with respect to the liquid surface of ink K. Of side walls adjacent to a bottom face 1011 on which the ink supply port 2 is arranged, the actuator 106 is arranged in a supply port side wall 1021d lying in the side of the ink supply port 2. One end of the actuator 106 is positioned in the vicinity of the ink supply port 2. Other end of the actuator 106 is positioned in the vicinity of a boundary between a top face 1031 positioned counter to the bottom face 1011 and the supply port side wall 1021d. Thus, the actuator 106 extends from the vicinity of the ink supply port 2 to the top face 1031. It is not absolutely necessary for the actuator 106 to extend from the vicinity of the ink supply port 2 to the top face 1031. However, the actuator 106 is preferable to have a length greater than half a distance from the ink supply 2 to the top surface 1031.

[0209] As shown in Figs. 48 - 51, by providing the actuator 106, the ink consumption status from an ink-full state in which the container 1 is full of ink K to an ink-end state or in-near-end state can be detected accurately. Thus, erroneous detection such as one judging to be ink-end or ink-near-end by the actuator 106 even though the ink remains enough in the ink cartridge can be prevented. Moreover, mistaken detection such as a case where the actuator 106 erroneously judges that enough ink remains in the container even though the actual consumption status is ink-end or ink-near-end can be prevented. Thereby, a printing defect can be prevented.

[0210] Fig. 52 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge according to another embodiment, where the ink supply port 2 supplies ink K in the vertical direction with respect to the liquid surface of ink K. The ink supply port 2 is of a hollow cylindrical shape. Moreover, in the ink supply port 2 there is provided a supply port valve 2000 formed of an elastic member such as rubber. The actuator 106 is provided on an inner wall surface in the hollow cylindrical ink supply port 2. The supply port valve 2000 is mounted to the ink supply port 2 in a fluid-tight manner so that it seals off ink inside the container 1 when the ink cartridge is not in use. On the other hand, in order to supply the ink to the recording head (not shown) provided in the ink-jet recording apparatus, the ink supply needle (not shown) breaks through the supply port valve 200 so as to be inserted into the ink supply port 2. Since the actuator is arranged on the inner wall surface in the ink supply port 2, the actuator 106 can detect the liquid surface of ink after the liquid surface of ink reaches almost to an interior end of the ink supply port 2 in the container 1. Thereby, the actuator 106 can detect the liquid surface of ink at the position close to the ink-end, so that ink inside the ink cartridge can be consumed out without waste.

[0211] Fig. 53 shows an embodiment of an ink cartridge which houses plural types of inks. A container 8 is divided into three ink housing chambers 9, 10 and 11 by walls. In respective ink housing chambers, ink supply ports 12, 13 and 14 are formed, respectively. In the respective ink housing chambers 9, 10 and 11, there are provided actuators 106 in a manner such that they come in contact with ink of respective ink housing chambers via openings provided in the container 8.

[0212] The container 8 includes at least two ink housing chambers such as 9, 10 and 11 which house different types of ink to one another. The ink supply ports 12, 13 and 14 which are provided in the respective ink housing chambers 9, 10 and 11 supply ink to the recording head from respective ink housing chambers 9, 10 and 11.

[0213] In Fig. 53, the actuator 106 is arranged in the supply port surface 1013 where the ink supply port 2 is provided. One end of the actuator 106 is provided in the vicinity of each of supply ports 12, 13 and 14. Other end of the actuator 106 is positioned in the vicinity of the top face (not shown) positioned counter to the bottom face 8a. In the present embodiment, the actuator 106 extends from the vicinity of the ink supply ports 12, 13 and 14 to the top face. The length of the actuator 106 is not specified by the distance from the vicinity of the supply port 2 to the top face. However, the length of the actuator 106 is preferably greater than half a distance from the ink supply port 2 to the top face.

[0214] Fig. 54 shows a process of detecting the liquid surface in a step-by-step manner according to the present embodiment. Let us label a sensor situated top among sensors as the first sensor, and second, third and fourth in this manner. Before the first sensor detects and judges that the ink is empty, the liquid surface level lies between the ink-full level and the first sensor. After the first sensor detects and judges that the ink is empty and before the second sensor detects and judges that the ink is empty, the liquid surface level lies between the first sensor and the second sensor. In the similar manner, the liquid surface level can be detected among five divided sections by four sensors.

[0215] For example, at point A in Fig. 54, suppose that the third sensor outputs a signal indicating that the ink is empty while the fourth sensor outputs a signal indicating that the ink is present. Then, we can tell that the liquid surface level lies between the third sensor and the fourth sensor.

[0216] Moreover, within a scope of the present invention, the position of the liquid surface may be obtained in further detailed manner. Namely, the level of the liquid surface is obtained between two sensors. For example, a detailed liquid surface level may be estimated based on an elapsed time after the liquid surface has passed a sensor. The detail liquid surface level may be estimated using another method. For example, the liquid surface position is calculated based on a printing amount by utilizing software. These structures are included in the step-by-step detection of the ink consumption in view of ink consumption detection utilizing the piezoelectric device.

[0217] Referring back to Fig. 7, an interval distance among plural elastic wave generating means 41 - 44 is such that the interval distance in the upper positions is set narrower than that in the lower positions. As the position goes downward, a pitch between sensors becomes narrower. Thereby, a detection interval becomes narrower when the remaining ink amount is low. Fig. 47 illustrates how the detection interval (an interval of the liquid surface to be detected and an interval of time (printing amount) becomes narrow. Here, compared to a case where there is enough ink left, the data on the consumption state is more important when the ink remaining amount is low. Then, the consumption state is preferably detected in a detailed manner. The consumption state is communicated to a user or is used for controlling the recording device. According to the present embodiment, provision of the sensors at different intervals, can comply with these requirements.

[0218] Fig. 55A and Fig. 55B show containers suitable for mounting liquid sensors. Preferably, a plurality of liquid sensors 802 are provided in a container wall disposed in the vicinity of the ink supply port 800. It is to be noted that, from Figs. 55A and 55B on, the supply port will be suitably illustrated in a simpler manner.

[0219] Referring to Fig. 55A, the ink supply port 800 is positioned on a container bottom face 804. The liquid sensor 802 is provided in a vertical wall disposed in the vicinity of the ink supply port 800. Referring to Fig. 5B, both the ink supply port 800 and the liquid sensor 802 are provided on the same vertical wall 806. The liquid sensor may be provided in another vertical wall (not shown) disposed vertical to the vertical wall 806.

[0220] By providing the liquid sensor in the vicinity of the ink supply port in this manner, the following advantageous aspects are obtained. In general, a high degree of positioning accuracy is required for the supply port, and a positioning structure satisfying this requirement is provided. For example, a positioning protrusion and a projected portion for use with positioning are provided. By providing the liquid sensor in a wall section in the vicinity of the supply port, a positioning structure for the supply port also functions as a positioning structure for the liquid sensor. A single positioning structure operates on the supply port and the liquid sensor. The positioning of the liquid sensor can be realized by a single structure. Detection accuracy can also be improved.

[0221] Figs. 56A and 56B show a structural example for positioning the supply port. In the periphery of the supply port (not shown) disposed on the bottom face of the cartridge, a quadrangle positioning protrusion 808 is provided. The positioning protrusion 808 is engaged with a positioning concave part 809 in the recording device side, in a sealing manner. The positioning concave part 809 is of a shape which corresponds to the positioning protrusion 808.

[0222] Such arrangement of the liquid sensor is suitably adopted in the following other embodiments. Fig. 10 shows another typical example of the ink cartridge comprised of a plurality of liquid sensors. In this configuration, there is provided a slanted wall in the bottom portion 1a of the container. The slanted wall may constitute part of the container. In this slanted wall, a plurality of elastic wave generating means 65a - 65c are arranged at constant or various intervals. By implementing this structure, the ink consumption state can be detected in a step-by-step manner.

[0223] If the bottom face of the container is horizontal, a single consumption state can essentially be detected despite of a plurality of sensors being arranged. On the contrary, since the sensor is arranged in the slanted wall in the present embodiment, the consumption state can be detected at plural steps even though the sensor is provided in the bottom face. The slanted wall makes a predetermined angle with respect to the horizontal direction. This predetermined angle is set to a suitable range of angle so that the consumption state can be detected at a plurality of desired steps by arranging a sensor or sensors.

[0224] Fig. 57 shows further advantageous aspects by utilizing the slanted wall. Suppose that the liquid surface moves by a distance x in the vertical direction. A movement distance y along with the slanted wall 810 is greater than the movement distance x in the vertical direction. Utilizing this fact, more liquid sensors 812 can be arranged in the vertical direction even though the size of a sensor or a mounting space is the same. Moreover, if the liquid sensors 812 are arranged at a same interval, the slanted wall can detect a smaller liquid movement (in the vertical direction) compared

to the vertical wall.

[0225] Fig. 58 shows another example where the liquid sensors are provided in the slanted wall. Part of a cartridge bottom section 820 is projected toward the interior of the container. This projected part 826 is provided in the vicinity of the ink supply port 824. A slanted wall 828 is formed in the projected part 826, liquid sensors 822 are provided in the slanted wall 828. Moreover, the projected part 826 is provided in part of the bottom section 820 when viewed from the front-rear direction in Fig. 58. The bottom section 820 is communicated to the supply port 824 via surrounding concave parts of the projected part 826, so that the projected part 826 does not prevent the ink from being discharged therefrom.

[0226] In this embodiment too, provision of the liquid sensors in the slanted wall gives rises to advantageous aspects. Moreover, as described above, an advantageous aspect is obtained in that the positioning accuracy is improved by providing a liquid sensor or sensors in the vicinity of the supply port.

[0227] Fig. 59 shows still another example utilizing the slanted wall. The slanted wall 830 is slanted toward the ink supply port 832 which supplies the liquid to the exterior of the container. The interval of the sensors 834 arranged is so set that it is narrower near the supply port 832 while it is wider far from the supply port 832. Thereby, as the remaining liquid amount becomes low, the detecting interval becomes narrower. As described before, data on the consumption state at the time when the ink remaining amount is low is more important than when the ink is rather full, and it is desirable to detect the consumption state in a detailed manner when the ink remaining amount is low. In this embodiment, these requirements are met by setting varied intervals for sensors.

[0228] Fig. 44A is another example where a plurality of liquid sensors are provided. In this embodiment, a liquid sensor such as the actuator 106 is arranged on the top wall of the cartridge. In this embodiment too, the consumption state can be detected at plural steps by utilizing partition walls inside the container.

[0229] Next, referring back to Fig. 32, Fig. 32 shows the mounting module 100 integrally formed with the actuator 106 serving as a liquid sensor. The mounting module 100 includes a mounting structure which mounts the actuator 106 to the cartridge.

[0230] Fig. 60 shows a structural example comprised of a plurality of liquid sensors 842 (actuators) using a plurality of mounting modules 840. By utilizing the mounting module 840, the liquid sensor 842 can be protected from outside, as described above. Moreover, the mounting of the liquid sensor 842 is facilitated. Moreover, if the mounting module 840 is structured in a detachable manner, it can be easily treated for a recycling purpose.

[0231] Fig. 61 shows a structural example where a plurality of liquid sensors 852 (actuators) can be mounted by a single mounting module 851. A plurality of liquid sensors 852 are arranged on a single mounting module 851. These liquid sensors 852 are formed integrally with the mounting module 851. This mounting module 851 is mounted to the ink cartridge. In this present embodiment, plural liquid sensors can be mounted with ease, and assembly therefor can be further improved.

[0232] Figs. 62A, 62B and 62C show various types of structures of the actuator as the liquid sensor. Fig. 62A shows a similar structure to that shown in Fig. 20. The actuator 860 comprises a single vibrating section 862. The vibrating section 862 includes a piezoelectric layer, an upper electrode and a lower electrode. In the present embodiment, a vibrating plate (not shown) is disposed between the base plate and a piezoelectric element. This vibrating plate functions as part of the vibrating section. In the base plate 863 there is provided a cavity disposed counter to the vibrating section.

[0233] In Fig. 62B, a plurality of liquid sensors 860 are arranged on a connecting member 864 common to the plural liquid sensors 860. This connecting member 864 is mounted to the ink cartridge. Thus, this structure is advantageous in that it saves time for mounting plural liquid sensors and facilitates assembly thereof.

[0234] In Fig. 62C, a single liquid sensor (actuator) 870 includes a plurality of vibrating sections 872. Such a liquid sensor 870 may be mounted to the ink cartridge. In this case, each vibrating section may be regarded as a separate liquid sensor. Thereby, further small amount of ink can be detected.

[0235] Next, modification to the liquid container will be described. In the present embodiment, the liquid container was the ink cartridge. The ink cartridge is one of modes such as ink container and ink tank. As described below, the ink tank is not limited to the above described type of ink cartridge.

[0236] As the ink tank of the ink-jet recording apparatus, there are so-called an on-carriage type and an off-carriage type. In the above described embodiments, description has been mainly made on the on-carriage type ink cartridge. Namely, the cartridge is provided on the carriage. In contrast, the present invention can also be applied similarly to the off-carriage type ink tank. In that case, the cartridge as the ink tank is provided on a fixed portion (such as a housing and so on) of the ink-jet recording apparatus. The cartridge and the recording head are connected by a tube or the like. The liquid sensor is provided in this fixed cartridge.

[0237] Fig. 63 shows an example of the off-carriage type ink cartridge. A head 882 is mounted to a carriage 880. The head 882 is connected to the ink cartridge 886 by way of a tube 884. The ink cartridge 886 is fixed on an appropriate setting position (not shown) of the ink-jet recording apparatus. The setting position may be provided in a movable manner. The ink cartridge 886 includes a plurality of liquid sensors 888.

[0238] Fig. 64 shows still another modified example of the container. In this embodiment, a plurality of liquid sen-

sors 892 are mounted to a sub-tank 890. The sub-tank 890 are also shown in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 (reference numeral 33). The sub-tank 890 is provided in the vicinity of the recording head and is communicated with the replaceable ink cartridge. This sub-tank 890 may be regarded as an ink tank so that the liquid sensor 892 can be mounted in the sub-tank 890. This modification can be applied to both the on-carriage type and off-carriage type structures.

5 [0239] Moreover, the ink tank may have partition members which divide the interior of the tank into a plurality of chambers, and a plurality of liquid sensors may be provided in these plural chambers, respectively. This mode is shown in Fig. 2, for example, and is suitable for a color printer. For each chamber there is provided a plurality of liquid sensors. The consumption state of plural-color ink housed in plural chambers can be detected individually.

10 [0240] Fig. 65 shows a control system of ink-jet recording apparatus according to the present embodiment. Three liquid sensors 1802, 1804 and 1806 are provided in the container wall of the ink cartridge 1800. Each liquid sensor has a piezoelectric element which corresponds to the above-described actuator or elastic wave generating means. The three liquid sensors 1802 - 1806 are provided at different positions in the liquid surface changing direction relative to the ink consumption. The liquid surface changing direction is typically a liquid surface level decreasing direction, and in the present embodiment the liquid surface level decreasing direction is mainly presupposed. These liquid sensors are controlled by a measuring process unit 1812 of a recording device control unit 1810. The recording device control unit 1810 further comprises an indicating process unit 1814, a printing operation control unit 1816, an ink replenishing process unit 1818, a cartridge replacing process unit 1820 and a printing data storing process unit 1822. These structures will be described in detail.

15 [0241] When a drive voltage is applied to respective liquid sensors 1802 - 1806 under the control of the measuring process unit 1812, the liquid sensor vibrates. In a method described above, the change in the acoustic impedance accompanied by the ink consumption is utilized. The residual vibration after the liquid sensor is driven, is detected. In another method, after the elastic wave is generated by the vibration, a signal corresponding to the reflected wave against the elastic wave is output. The time necessary for the reflected wave to return may be detected. Another method utilizing the piezoelectric element may be adopted.

20 [0242] Since the acoustic impedance drastically changes based on whether or not the liquid surface is higher than a sensor, a detection signal of the liquid sensor differs. Based on the detection signal, the measuring process unit 1812 can judge whether or not the liquid surface of ink has passed the each sensor. The detection process are periodically performed at a predetermined timing.

25 [0243] Here, let us call a state in which the liquid surface is lower than the sensor "ink-empty state" while a state in which the liquid surface is higher than the sensor be "ink-present state". When the liquid surface passes the sensor, the detection result changes from the "ink-present state" to the "ink-empty state". In the present embodiment, the detection in which the liquid surface has passed means this detection result.

30 [0244] As a feature of the present embodiment, the measuring process unit 1812 switches the sensor's detection position along the liquid surface decreasing direction corresponding to a progress of the ink consumption. After the cartridge is mounted, namely, at an ink-full state, the liquid sensor 1802 only is used. When the ink is consumed and the liquid surface passes the sensor 1802, the liquid sensor 1802 detects the ink-empty state. Responding to this, the measuring process unit 1812 switches the ink detection position to a middle stage. Namely, the ink consumption is detected by using only the liquid sensor 1804. In a similar manner, when the liquid sensor 1804 detects the ink-empty state, the detection position is switched to the lowest stage (the liquid sensor 1806).

35 [0245] According to the present embodiment, since the detection position is switched downward in sequence, all of liquid sensors are not necessarily operative constantly, so that operation of the liquid sensors can be reduced. Thereby, a data processing amount in the measuring process unit 1812 can be reduced.

40 [0246] Moreover, in the present embodiment, the detection frequency increases corresponding to the change in the ink liquid surface. It is preferably that the detection frequency be increased as the detection position is shifted downward. Namely, the interval of the detection processing is changed to be shortened. Thereby, the number of detection becomes less as a whole (see following description).

45 [0247] For example, when the ink liquid surface is higher than the liquid sensor 1802, the amount of ink is large, so that there is no immediate necessity to detect the liquid surface's passing. Thus, the detection frequency is set to a relatively small number until the liquid sensor 1802 detects the ink-empty state. On the other hand, after the liquid surface of ink has passed the liquid sensor 1804, the next sensor to detect the ink surface's passing is the liquid sensor 1806. The liquid sensor 1806 is positioned at a lowest position and detects the ink-near-end state (in which the ink approaches the complete consumption of the ink). The liquid sensor 1806 preferably detects the liquid surface's passing at an early state. Thus, the detection frequency of the liquid sensor 1806 is set to a larger number than that of the liquid sensor 1802. By controlling in this manner, the detection frequency when the detection of the ink consumption is required in a speedy manner, is set to a large number while the detection frequency is set to a smaller number at other states. After the necessary data are securely obtained, the number of detection processes can be made small as a whole.

50 [0248] An advantage of the present embodiment is obviously significant compared to a case where there is pro-

vided a single liquid sensor. Suppose that there is provided only a liquid sensor 1806 which detects the ink-near-end state. Then, in order for the liquid sensor 1806 to early detect the arrival of the liquid surface, it is necessary to constantly repeat the detection process at a high frequency. In the present embodiment in contrast thereto, when the ink consumption does not progress so much, it suffices to detect the ink consumption at a relatively low detection frequency by utilizing the liquid sensor 1802 and the liquid sensor 1804. Thus, the number of operating the liquid sensors can be significantly reduced.

[0249] As described above, according to the present embodiment, the consumption state of ink can be efficiently and accurately grasped with a relatively small amount of detection operation. A processing load for the measuring process unit 1812 can be reduced. This is also advantageous for other structures in the recording device control unit 1810.

10 For example, when the printing operation continues for the long period of time in a large-scale recording apparatus, the number of measuring processes during the printing operation can be significantly made small.

[0250] Moreover, in the present embodiment, it is not always necessary to change the detection frequency whenever the detection position is switched. For example, the liquid sensor 1802 and the liquid sensor 1804 in Fig. 65 may detect the ink consumption at the same detection frequency. Or, the liquid sensor 1804 may have the same detection frequency as the liquid sensor 1806. In the present embodiment, three liquid sensors are provided. However, it suffices to provide two liquid sensors or more. The distance between adjacent liquid sensors may not be equal. For example, it is preferable that the interval of the liquid sensors be narrower as the liquid surface becomes low. These modifications can be applied in the following other embodiments.

20 Control of the ink-jet recording apparatus based on the ink consumption state

[0251] Referring back to Fig. 65, the recording device control unit 1810 comprises an indicating process unit 1814, a printing operation control unit 1816, an ink replenishing process unit 1818, a cartridge replacing process unit 1820 and a printing data storing process unit 1822. In this configuration, the ink-jet recording apparatus is controlled based on the ink consumption state detected by the measuring process unit 1812. In the present embodiment, the liquid position is detected in a step-by-step manner by detecting the change in impedance at the plurality of detection positions. A plurality of the liquid positions can be obtained which is impossible if there is only a single sensor. Since these data on the liquid positions are utilized, the recording apparatus can be suitably controlled. Moreover, the recording device control unit 1810 may be provided inside the ink-jet recording apparatus, or provided in the exterior thereof. The functions of the control unit 1810 in part or whole may be provided in an external device such as computer and the like connected to the recording apparatus.

[0252] The indicating process unit 1814 indicates data corresponding to the liquid sensor which has detected the liquid surface's passing. As an indicating means, a display 1830 and a speaker 1832 are used. The display 1830 is, for example, a display panel of the recording apparatus. The display 1830 may be a screen of the computer connected to the recording apparatus. Preferably, display mode changes corresponding to the liquid sensor which has detected the liquid surface's passing.

[0253] Fig. 66 shows a processing example where the display mode differs. When the liquid sensor 1802 in the highest position detects the liquid surface's passing, a blue long bar figure is displayed. The similar figure may be displayed prior to the detection by the liquid sensor 1802. Next, when the liquid sensor 1804 in the intermediate step detects the liquid surface's passing, an intermediate long and yellow bar figure is displayed. Moreover, when the liquid sensor 1806 in the lowest position detects the liquid surface's passing, a red short bar figure is displayed. The display may be of a mode such that an LED or the like are directly used. By changing the display mode and changing the color and figure for detailed data, the consumption state of ink can be notified to a user in a clear manner.

[0254] Moreover, the indicating process unit 1814 indicates data by using the speaker 1832. When the liquid sensor detects the liquid surface's passing, notifying sound is output from the speaker 1832. The speaker 1832 may be a recording apparatus' speaker or a speaker of an external apparatus such as a computer connected to the recording apparatus. Preferably, the notifying sound is made different according to the liquid sensor. Moreover, it is also preferable to use a sound signal as notifying sound. Synthetic voice indicating the ink consumption state is generated by speech synthesis processing. The content of a message changes according to the ink amount, that is, the liquid sensor which detects the liquid surface's passing.

[0255] Other structures such as 1816, 1818 and so on of the recording device control unit 1810 begin to perform a low-ink-amount countermeasure process when the liquid sensor (1806, Fig. 65) mounted in the lowest position in the ink cartridge detects the liquid surface's passing. The low-ink-amount countermeasure process is a process by which to stop or suppress the recording apparatus operation such as an improper printing operation and the like in the light of the fact that the ink remaining amount is very low.

[0256] The printing operation control unit 1816 stops the printing operation as the low-ink-amount countermeasure process, by controlling the printing apparatus 1834. Thereby, the printing operation after the ink is depleted can be avoided.

[0257] The printing operation control unit 1816 may prohibit a printing maintenance operation (cleaning operation) as the low-ink-amount countermeasure process. In the present embodiment, an object for the printing maintenance includes a print head. At the time of performing maintenance on the print head, a relatively large amount of ink is absorbed from the head. In this embodiment, a small amount of ink left is prevented from being absorbed from the head for the maintenance purpose. Thereby, that the ink is in short because of the maintenance can be avoided.

[0258] Moreover, as another example of the low-ink-amount countermeasure process, the printing operation control unit 1816 may prohibit a printing process from being shifted to the next printing process after a certain printing process ends. Thereby, it can prevent a series of printing process, for example, a series of printing sentences from being interrupted in the midst.

[0259] As a low-ink-amount countermeasure process, the ink replenishing process 1818 automatically replenishes the ink cartridge with ink by controlling the ink replenishing device 1836. Thereby, the printing can continue.

[0260] As a low-ink-amount countermeasure process, the cartridge replacing process unit 1820 automatically replaces the ink cartridge by controlling the cartridge replacing device 1838. By this countermeasure too, the printing operation can continue.

[0261] As a low-ink-amount countermeasure process, the printing data storing process unit 1822 stores the printing data prior to the printing operation, to the printing data storing unit 1840. Thereby, the printing data prior to the printing operation can be prevented from being lost.

[0262] Not all of these structures 1814 - 1822 may be provided in the recording device control unit 1810. It suffices to carry out at least one low-ink-amount countermeasure process. For example, as long as there is provided the ink replenishing process unit 1818 or the cartridge replacing process unit 1820, the printing operation control unit 1816 may not perform stopping process of the printing operation. Moreover, there may be provided a structure by which to avoid the improper operation due to ink shortage, which is not of the above-described structure performing the low-ink-amount countermeasure process.

[0263] It is preferable that the above low-ink-amount countermeasure process be performed after the liquid sensor positioned in the lowest position detects the liquid surface's passing and "a predetermined additional amount" of printing has been performed. The "predetermined additional amount" of printing is set to an amount less than the printing amount capable of consuming all the remaining ink after the liquid sensor detected the liquid surface.

[0264] Referring to Fig. 65, what the liquid sensor 1806 detects is the ink-near-end state. A small amount of ink remains after the liquid sensor 1806 detects the liquid surface's passing. According to the present embodiment, after the ink is further consumed, namely, after the ink is used as much as possible, the low-ink-amount countermeasure process can be performed.

[0265] The above "predetermined additional amount" may be defined as the number of printed sheets. For example, the number of printed sheets is set in advance after the liquid sensor in the lowest position detected the liquid surface's passing and until the low-ink-amount countermeasure process is performed. In this embodiment, performing the low-ink-amount countermeasure process in the middle of printing a certain page can be avoided. Stoppage of the printing in the middle of printing operation and the start of cartridge replacing process in the middle of printing operation can be avoided. Thus, the low-ink-amount countermeasure process can be performed at a proper timing.

Grasp of liquid surface level by scanning the sensor

[0266] Fig. 67 shows a recording device control system according to another embodiment of the present invention. An ink cartridge 1900 is of a vertically elongated shape and is, for example, a so-called fixed type ink cartridge for use with off-carriage. The ink cartridge 1900 includes seven liquid sensors 1902 - 1914 along with the liquid surface decreasing direction due to the ink consumption. The operation of respective liquid sensors is substantially the same as that in the embodiment shown in Fig. 65. A measuring process unit 1812 supplies to each liquid sensor a drive voltage, and receives a counter electromotive force which each sensor outputs.

[0267] The Measuring process unit 1812 detects periodically the liquid surface position of ink at a predetermined measuring interval. For every detection process, the liquid sensors 1902 - 1914 are used. For example, the liquid sensors operate in the order from the uppermost liquid sensor 1902 to the lowermost liquid sensor 1914 (scanning operation of the liquid sensor). Suppose that the liquid surface level lies between the sensor 1910 and the liquid sensor 1912. In this case, the liquid sensors 1902 - 1910 detect the ink-empty state. On the other hand, the liquid sensor 1912 and the liquid sensor 1914 detect the ink-present state. Thus, the liquid surface level can be accurately obtained. Moreover, the direction in which the liquid sensor scans may be in the reverse direction.

[0268] The measuring process unit 1812 may not use the liquid sensor(s) which detected the liquid surface's passing. For example, in Fig. 67 the liquid sensors 1902-1910 are situated in the detection positions where the liquid surface has already passed, thus these liquid sensors may not be used for the detection process. Here, the liquid sensor which has detected the ink-empty state for the predetermined number of times may be excluded from a detection processing object. Thereby, the liquid sensor(s) which is (are) obviously situated above the liquid surface can be excluded from the

detection processing object.

[0269] The measuring process unit 1812 preferably increases the detection frequency when the number of liquid sensors not used in the detection process increases. That the number of liquid sensors not used in the detection process increases means that the liquid surface becomes further low. When the liquid surface becomes low and the ink remaining amount is low, the ink consumption can be detected fast by increasing the detection frequency. Thus, since the number of sensors in use is reduced, a possible increase of load for the measuring process unit will be minimum. Thus, according to this embodiment, while suppressing the increase of load of the detection process, the ink consumption can be detected as fast as possible when the ink remaining amount is low.

[0270] In a preferable embodiment, the scanning direction of the liquid sensors can be switched during the progress of the ink consumption. Fig. 68 shows a switching process of the scanning direction. A predetermined detection direction switch level 1920 (scanning direction switching level) is set in advance. In this example, the switch level 1920 is identical to the height of the liquid sensor 1908. The liquid sensor 1908 is situated approximately in the center of the ink cartridge. When the liquid surface is above the switch level 1920, the scanning direction is downward. Thus, first of all, the liquid sensor 1902 operates and then the liquid sensor 1904 and in this downward order the sensor operates. On the other hand, when the ink consumption progresses and the liquid surface level becomes below the switch level 1920, namely, when the liquid sensor 1908 detects the ink-empty state, the scanning direction of the liquid sensor is switched to the upward direction. Then, the liquid sensor 1914 operates first, then the liquid sensor 1912 operates and in this upward order the sensor operates.

[0271] Here, when the liquid surface is high, the liquid surface can be detected faster if the liquid surface is searched in the downward direction. On the contrary, when the liquid surface is low, searching the liquid surface in the upward direction is faster in detecting the liquid surface. Thus, in the present embodiment, the liquid surface level can be efficiently grasped.

[0272] Moreover, in the present embodiment, once the liquid surface level is grasped, the liquid detection may be terminated even before completing the detection at all scheduled detection positions. For instance, in a case of left-hand side of Fig. 68 where the liquid surface level is found when the liquid sensor 1906 detects the ink-present state, then the detection process may be terminated.

[0273] As apparent from the above description, according to the present embodiment, the liquid surface level can be found faster efficiently and the wasteful operation of liquid sensor(s) can be reduced.

[0274] The switch level 1920 may not be in the center of the cartridge. Moreover, the switch level 1920 may not be at the same position as the sensor in the center.

Sensor usage limit during printing operation

[0275] Preferably, the measuring control process is changed according to whether or not the ink-jet recording apparatus is in the midst of the printing operation. During the printing operation, the number of the liquid sensors to be used for detection is limited. This is a process in which smaller number of liquid sensors than usual is used in the hope that the recording device control based on the detection result can obtain limited data within a possible range.

[0276] Preferably, the liquid sensor (see Fig. 67, 1914) in the lowest position only is used during the printing operation. Utilizing this liquid sensor in the lowest position, whether or not the ink remaining amount is low only is judged. If not during the printing operation, the other liquid sensors will be used according to the above-described process.

[0277] Next, advantageous aspects of this embodiment will be described. It is desirable that the load for the ink consumption detecting process be made as small as possible. For example, the recording device control unit 1810 in Fig. 67 controls the detection process and the printing operation. There is possibility that the detection process may affect the printing operation. It is considered that the printing process proceeds faster if the detection process is simple. Since in the present embodiment the operation of the liquid sensors is controlled within a range where useful data are obtained, the load for the detection process during the printing operation can be made small.

[0278] As for modes of the sensor operations, various modifications are possible. For example, the liquid sensors are suitably thinned down. The even-numbered or odd-numbered liquid sensors only may be used. Moreover, the liquid sensor in the uppermost position only, the liquid sensor in the center only or the liquid sensor in the lowest position only may be used. Moreover, the liquid sensor only which is expected to detect the liquid surface's passing next may be used. In the example shown in Fig. 67 in this case, during the printing operation the liquid sensor 1912 only is used.

Fail countermeasure

[0279] Moreover, in the present embodiment, the following process will be performed as a printer-fail countermeasure. Fig. 69 shows a fail countermeasure according to the present embodiment. A white circle in the figure indicates that the liquid sensor detects the ink-empty state while the black circle indicates that the liquid sensor detects the ink-present state. As shown in the figure, three liquid sensors from the top 1902 - 1906 detect the ink-empty states. Fourth

liquid sensor from the top 1908 detects the ink-present state. However, the fifth liquid sensor from the top 1910 detects the ink-empty state. The two liquid sensors from the bottom 1912 and 1914 detect the ink-present states.

[0280] Then, it is considered that a fail occurs in the liquid sensor 1908 or the liquid sensor 1910. However, which one of the two causes a fail in the liquid sensor can not be known. Thus, in the present embodiment, it is judged that the liquid surface level lies between the liquid sensor 1910 and the liquid sensor 1912. This means that the liquid sensor in an upper side causes a fail when a possibility of fail lies among a plurality of liquid sensors. By judging in this manner, the liquid surface level is estimated to be the lower one, thus the ill effect due to a possible erroneous judgement can be minimized.

[0281] Figs. 70A and 70B show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge to which the present invention is applied. Fig. 70A is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge in the bottom portion according to the present embodiment. The ink cartridge according to the present embodiment, includes a through hole 1c in the bottom face 1a of the container housing the ink therein. The bottom portion of the through hole 1c is covered by an actuator 1650. The through hole 1c is arranged in a slanted face provided in the bottom face 1a of the container 1. The actuator 1650 comes in contact with ink inside the ink cartridge by way of the through hole 1c. The ink cartridge and the actuator 1650 are mounted in a fluid-tight manner. A bottom end of the through hole 1c has a surface parallel to the liquid surface of ink and is so formed that the residual ink would not remain in the through hole 1c.

[0282] Fig. 70B is a detailed cross sectional view of the actuator 1650 and the through hole 1c shown in Fig. 70A. Fig. 70C is a plan view of the actuator 1650 and the through hole 1c shown in Fig. 70B. The actuator 1650 includes a vibrating plate 72 and a piezoelectric element 73 fixed on the vibrating plate 72. The actuator 1650 is fixed on the bottom face of the container 1 such that the piezoelectric element 73 is disposed counter to the through hole 1c by way of the vibrating plate 72 and the base plate 71. The vibrating plate 72 is elastically deformable and ink-resistant.

[0283] Depending on the ink amount in the container 1, changes the amplitude and frequency of the counter electromotive force which is generated by the residual vibration of the piezoelectric element 73 and the vibrating plate 72. Though the through hole 1c is formed in a position counter to the actuator 1650, the bottom end of the through hole 1c includes a face parallel to the liquid surface of ink. Thus, residual ink is not caused in the through hole 1c. Thereby, the change in the amplitude and frequency of the counter electromotive force detected by the actuator 1650 will be significant due to the consumption state of ink. Thus, it won't happen that the actuator 1650 detects a mistaken consumption state of ink.

[0284] On the other hand, it may be designed such that a predetermined amount of ink can remain as residue in the through hole 1c. Even in the case where a predetermined amount of ink is designed to remain as residue in the through hole 1c, the ink-end state can be reliably detected if the vibration characteristic of the actuator 1650 determined by the ink amount which remains in the through hole 1c was measured in advance.

[0285] Fig. 71 is a perspective view showing still another embodiment of the actuator.

[0286] As shown in Fig. 71, an actuator 1670 is arranged in a slanted face 2001 provided at the bottom face 1a of the ink cartridge. An opening 2002 is provided in the slanted face 2001 of the bottom face 1a. The actuator 1670 is engaged with the opening 2002 in a fluid-tight manner. Thereby, the actuator 1670 is arranged so that it is slanted with respect to the liquid surface of ink. Moreover, the actuator 1670 can contact with ink inside the ink cartridge.

[0287] Fig. 72 is a cross sectional view in the vicinity of the a bottom portion of the ink container when the module 100 shown in Fig. 32 is mounted to the container 1. The module 100 is so mounted that it penetrates through the side wall of the container. In a coupling face between the side wall of the container 1 and the module 100, an O ring 1365 is provided, so as to keep fluid-tightness between the module 100 and the container 1. In order to seal with the O ring, the module is preferably comprised of a cylindrical portion as described in Fig. 32. By inserting a tip end of the module 100 into the interior of the container 1, ink inside the container 1 comes in contact with the actuator 106 via a through hole 112 of a plate 110. Since the resonant frequency of the residual vibration of the actuator 106 differs corresponding to whether the periphery of the vibrating section of the actuator 106 is occupied by liquid or gas, the consumption state of ink can be detected by utilizing the module 100. Moreover, it is not limited to the module 100 alone, and other mode of module may be mounted to the container 1 so as to detect whether or not the ink is present.

[0288] Fig. 73 is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge for use with single color, e.g. black color, according to an embodiment of the present invention. In the container 1 which houses ink, there is provided an ink supply port 2 which joins with an ink supply needle of the recording apparatus. In the bottom face 1a of the container, an actuator 1106 is mounted so that it can contact with ink inside the container by way of the container. The actuator 1106 is provided in a such manner that a medium which contacts with the actuator 1106 changes from ink to gas at a stage where the ink K is almost consumed out, namely, at a point of the ink-near-end state. The container 1 includes a slanted face 2025 having a slanting degree against the liquid surface of ink, and the actuator 1106 is arranged on that slanted face 2025. Thus, the vibrating region of the actuator 1106 is arranged such that it is tilted with respect to the liquid surface of ink inside the ink cartridge.

[0289] In the present embodiment, the slanted face 2025 which is tilted with respect to the liquid surface of ink is provided on an adjacent face 1020 which lies adjacent to a supply port forming face 1010 on which the ink supply port

is provided. However, the slanted face 2025 is not limited to being provided in the adjacent face 1020. For example, the slanted face 2025 may be provided in the supply port forming face 1010 so that the actuator 1106 is arranged on the slanted face 2025 provided in the supply port forming face 1010.

[0290] The tilted angle of the slanted face 2025 is not to be specified. However, preferably, the tilted angle of the slanted face 2025 is set such that the tilted angle of the actuator 1106 with respect to the liquid surface of ink is approximately 30 degrees to 60 degrees.

[0291] Moreover, in the ink supply port 2 there are provided a packing ring 4 and a valve body 6. As shown in Fig. 3, the packing ring 4 is engaged with the ink supply needle 32 communicating with the recording head 31 in a fluid-tight manner. The valve body 6 is elastically contacted with the packing ring 4 by the spring 5. When the ink supply needle 32 is inserted, the valve body 6 is pressed by the ink supply needle 32 so as to open the ink passage. Then, ink inside the container 1 is supplied to the recording head via the ink supply port 2 and the ink supply needle 32. On a top wall of the container 1, the semiconductor memory means 7 is mounted which stores data related to ink inside the ink cartridge.

[0292] In Fig. 73, a single actuator 1106 only is arranged in the ink cartridge. However, the number of actuators 1106 is not limited to a specific number. Thus, a plurality of actuators 1106 may be arranged on the slanted face of the ink cartridge.

[0293] Fig. 74 is a cross sectional view of a sub-tank unit according to still another embodiment. In a sub-tank unit 33 including a container 34 housing ink therein, part of the adjacent face 2050 which is adjacent to a supply port forming face 2040 in which an ink supply port 35 is provided is slanted with respect to the liquid surface of ink. An actuator 2106 is arranged on the slanted face tilted with respect to the liquid surface of ink of the adjacent face 2050. Thereby, the actuator 2106 is arranged in a manner tilted with respect to the liquid surface of ink.

[0294] In the present embodiment, the actuator 2106 is arranged on the adjacent face 2050. However, the actuator 2106 may be provided on an adjacent face 2060 disposed counter to the adjacent face 2050.

[0295] Figs. 75A, 75B and 75C show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 180. A deformed O ring 614 is formed in a side wall 2194b in a manner such that it surrounds the actuator 106. In the side wall 2194b, there are formed a plurality of caulking members 616 in order to connect a circuit board 610 to an ink container 2194. The circuit board 610 is joined with the ink container 2194 by the caulking member 616, and the exterior of the ink cartridge and the interior of the ink cartridge are kept in a fluid-tight manner while a vibrating region of the actuator 106 can contact with ink. Moreover, as shown in Fig. 75A, in the present embodiment, the circuit board 610 is mounted in a manner such that it is tilted with respect to the liquid surface of ink. Thereby, the actuator 106 is arranged in a tilted manner with respect to the liquid surface of ink.

[0296] Figs. 76A, 76B, 76C and 76D show still another embodiment of the ink cartridge 180. In the ink cartridge 180M shown in Fig. 76A, a plurality of actuators 106 are attached on the side wall 2194b of the ink container 2194. A plurality of actuators formed integrally shown in Fig. 20 are preferably used as these plural actuators 106. A plurality of actuators 106 are arranged on the side wall 2194b in the vertical direction spaced at various or fixed intervals. By providing a plurality of actuators 106 in the vertical direction spaced at an interval, the ink remaining amount can be detected in a step-by-step manner.

[0297] In the ink cartridge 180N shown in Fig. 76B, an elongating actuator 2606 in the vertical direction is mounted on the side wall 2194b of the ink container 2194. By providing the elongating actuator 2606 in the vertical direction, the ink remaining amount in the ink container 2194 can be continuously detected. The length of the actuator 2606 is preferably greater than half a height of the side wall 2194b. In the Fig. 76B, the actuator has a length covering approximately the top end and the lower end of the side wall 2194b.

[0298] Similar to the ink cartridge 180M shown in Fig. 76A, in the ink cartridge 1800 shown in Fig. 76C, a plurality of actuators 106 are mounted on the side wall 2194b of the ink container 2194, and there is provided an elongating wave preventing wall 2192 in the vertical direction with a predetermined distance away facing the plural actuators 106. A plurality of the integrally formed actuators 106 are preferably used as these plural actuators 106. A clearance filled with ink is formed between the actuator 106 and the wave preventing wall 192. The interval between the wave preventing wall 2192 and the actuator 106 is provided such that the ink will not be held there by the capillary force. When the ink container 2194 is shaken by a rolling, a wave of ink is generated inside the ink container 2194, so that gas or bubble might be detected by the actuator 106 due to such a shock and that the actuator might operate erroneously. By providing the wave preventing wall 2192 according to the present embodiment, the undulation of ink in the vicinity of the actuator 106 can be prevented and the erroneous operation of the actuator 106 can be prevented. Moreover, the wave preventing wall 2192 prevents the bubble caused by the ink shaking, from invading the actuator 106. As shown in Figs. 76A, 76B and 76C, in the present embodiment a side wall disposed counter to a side wall in which there is provided an ink supply port is slanted. On the slanted face of the side wall, the actuators 106 are arranged. Thereby, the actuators are provided in a slanted position with respect to the liquid surface of ink.

[0299] By providing the ink cartridge shown in Figs. 75A - 75C and Figs. 76A - 76C where the plural actuators 106 are arranged in a slanted position with respect to the liquid surface of ink, the ink consumption amount of ink can be

detected steplessly or in a step-by-step manner. Moreover, the ink can recede smoothly and preferably.

[0300] Figs. 77A and 77B show an ink cartridge as an exemplary container according to still another embodiment. Fig. 77A is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge of the present embodiment taken along a longitudinal direction or vertical direction. Fig. 77B is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge of the present embodiment taken along a latitudinal direction or cross direction.

[0301] The ink cartridge according to the present embodiment comprises a container 1003 housing ink therein, an ink supply port 2 which supplies ink to the exterior of the container 1003 and an elastic wave generating means 2003 which detects the ink consumption state inside the container 1003. The elastic wave generating means 2003 suitably detects the consumption state of ink K based on change in the traveled time of the elastic wave based on the amount 10 of ink K. The elastic wave generating means 2003 is preferably provided in the vicinity of the ink supply port 2. Moreover, the elastic wave generating means 2003 may be provided directly on the ink supply port 2.

[0302] The elastic wave generating means 2003 may be provided in anyone of three faces among a supply port forming face 1010, adjacent faces 1020a, 1020b and 1a, and an opposed face 1030. However, in any case where the elastic wave generating means 2003 is arranged in any face among the supply port forming face 1010 and adjacent 15 faces 1020a, 1020b and 1a, the elastic wave generating means 2003 is provided in the vicinity of the ink supply port 2.

[0303] When the elastic wave generating means 2003 is arranged on the adjacent face, the elastic wave generating means 2003 may be provided in any face among the supply port adjacent face 1a, the opposite adjacent face 1020a and an enclosing adjacent face 1020b. In Fig. 77A, it is provided on the bottom face 1a. In the present embodiment, the bottom face 1a is the supply port adjacent face 1a. However, in any case where the elastic wave generating means 20 2003 is arranged in any face among the supply port adjacent face 1a and the opposite adjacent face 1020a and the enclosing adjacent face 1020b, the elastic wave generating means 2003 is provided in the vicinity of the ink supply port 2.

[0304] Figs. 78A and 78B show an embodiment of the ink cartridge where the elastic wave generating means 2003 is provided on the supply port forming face 1010. Fig. 78A is a cross sectional view of the ink cartridge according to the 25 present embodiment, taken along the latitudinal direction or cross direction of the ink cartridge. Fig. 78B is an ink cartridge according to the present embodiment, viewed from the longitudinal direction or orthogonal to vertical direction. In the present embodiment, the elastic wave generating means 2003 is provided in a position above the supply port 2 in the supply port forming face 1010. Preferably, the elastic wave generating means 2003 is provided at approximately midpoint in the cross direction of the ink cartridge.

[0305] When mounting the ink cartridge to the ink-jet recording apparatus, the user inserts the ink supply needle into the ink supply port 2. Thus, the ink cartridge is usually mounted to the ink-jet recording apparatus accompanied by rotation about the ink supply port 2. In that case, even if the ink cartridge is rotated about the ink supply port 2, displacement of the elastic wave generating means 2003 against the ink-jet recording apparatus will be small since the elastic wave generating means 2003 is provided approximately in the center in the cross direction of the ink cartridge. Thus, 30 for example, after the elastic wave generating means 2003 is mounted to the ink cartridge, that the contact between terminals provided in the ink-jet recording apparatus and the elastic wave generating means 2003 is shut out due to the displacement between the elastic wave generating means 2003 and the ink-jet recording apparatus will not result. Thereby, the normal course of the elastic wave generating means 2003 operation can be kept, so that erroneous operation does not occur.

[0306] Figs. 79A and 79B show an embodiment of an ink cartridge where the elastic wave generating means 2003 is provided on the enclosing adjacent face 1020b. Fig. 79A shows the ink cartridge viewed from the latitudinal direction or vertical direction in the cross direction. Fig. 79B shows the ink cartridge according to the present embodiment viewed from the longitudinal direction or orthogonal direction in the vertical direction. In Figs. 79A and 79B, the elastic wave generating means 2003 is provided on an enclosing adjacent face 1020b, however, the elastic wave generating means 20 45 2003 may be provided on other enclosing adjacent face 1020b. However, the elastic wave generating means 2003 is provided in the vicinity of the ink supply port 2.

[0307] In Fig. 77A and Fig. 78A, the packing ring 4 and the valve body 6 are provided in the ink supply port 2. Referring to Figs. 79A and 79B, the packing ring 4 is engaged with the ink supply needle 32 communicating with the recording head 31, in a fluid-tight manner. The valve body 6 is constantly and elastically contacted to the packing 4 by the 50 spring 5. When the ink supply needle 32 is inserted, the valve body 6 is pressed by the ink supply needle 32 so as to open the ink passage, so that ink inside the container 1 is supplied to the recording head 31 via the ink supply port 2 and the ink supply needle 32. On the top wall of the container 1, there is mounted the semiconductor memory means 7 which stores data related to ink inside the container 1.

[0308] Figs. 80A is a perspective view of the ink cartridge housing plural types of ink according to an embodiment, 55 viewed from a rear side. The container 8 is divided into the ink chambers 9, 10 and 11 by partition wall. In respective ink chambers, there are formed ink supply ports 12, 13 and 14. In the bottom face 8a of the respective ink chambers 9, 10 and 11, the elastic wave generating means 15, 16 and 17 are mounted so that the elastic wave can be transmitted to the ink housed in each ink chamber via the container 8.

[0309] The container 8 comprises at least two ink housing chambers 9, 10 and 11 which house different types of ink to one another. The ink supply ports 12, 13 and 14 provided in the respective ink housing chambers 9, 10 and 11 supply ink from the respective ink housing chambers 9, 10 and 11 to the recording head. The elastic wave generating means 3 are provided in the vicinity of the respective ink supply ports 12, 13 and 14.

5 [0310] A black spot P in the housing chambers 9, 10 and 11 in Fig. 80A indicates a position where the elastic wave generating means 2003 is arranged. The elastic wave generating means 2003 may be provided in any one of ink housing chambers 9, 10 and 11. The elastic wave generating means 2003 is provided at least one in each of the ink housing chambers 9, 10 and 11.

10 [0311] When the ink inside the container 1 and ink housing chambers 9, 10 and 11 is consumed, whether or not the ink is empty in the vicinity of the ink supply port 12, 13 or 14 can be reliably detected by the elastic wave generating means 2003 since the elastic wave generating means 2003 is provided in the vicinity of the ink supply ports 12, 13 or 14.

15 [0312] When mounting the ink cartridge to the ink-jet recording apparatus, the user inserts the ink supply needle (see Fig. 81) into the ink supply port 2. Thus, the ink cartridge is usually mounted to the ink-jet recording apparatus, accompanied by the rotation about the ink supply port 2. For example, the ink cartridge is mounted to the ink-jet recording apparatus while accompanied is the rotation about the longitudinal direction or the vertical direction of the ink cartridge (rotation about an axis of the ink supply port 2), the rotation about the latitudinal direction or cross direction of the ink cartridge or the rotation about the height of the ink cartridge. In order that the ink supply needle (see Fig. 81) can be correctly inserted into the ink supply port 2, the rotation of the ink cartridge is usually designed such that it becomes 20 a rotation with the ink supply needle serving as the axis.

25 [0313] Thus, there are cases where in a position relatively away from the ink supply port 2 of the ink cartridge the elastic wave generating means 2003 has a large region in which it has friction between the ink-jet recording apparatus. For example, there are cases where a terminal or the like of the elastic wave generating means 2003 is contacted with a holder of the ink cartridge of the ink-jet recording apparatus so as to cause friction therebetween. When the elastic wave generating means 2003 is arranged relatively away from the ink supply port 2, the elastic wave generating means 2003 has a longer distance in which it has friction between the ink-jet recording apparatus. Thereby, there is concern that the elastic wave generating means 2003 be worn out and damaged.

30 [0314] Moreover, in a position relatively away from the ink supply port of the ink cartridge, displaced distance between the ink cartridge and the ink-jet recording apparatus becomes relatively large when the ink cartridge is mounted to the ink-jet recording apparatus. Thus, it might occur that the contact between the terminals arranged in the ink-jet recording apparatus and the elastic wave generating means 2003 is lost due to the displacement between the elastic wave generating means 2003 and the ink-jet recording apparatus after the ink cartridge is mounted. Thereby, the elastic wave generating means 2003 would not be able to keep its original operation and an erroneous operation might be caused.

35 [0315] Provision of the elastic wave generating means 3 in the vicinity of the ink supply port 2, 12, 13 or 14 a distance to have friction with the ink-jet recording apparatus becomes rather small. Moreover, thereby, prevented is that the contact between terminals arranged in the ink-jet recording apparatus and the elastic wave generating means 2003 is lost due to the displacement between the elastic wave generating means 2003 and the ink-jet recording apparatus after the ink cartridge has been mounted to the ink-jet recording apparatus. Thereby, the elastic wave generating means 40 2003 can keep its intrinsic operation, so that no malfunction results. Since the displacement between the elastic wave generating means 2003 and the ink-jet recording apparatus is relatively small, mounting the elastic wave generating means 2003 to the ink cartridge can be made easy in the course of manufacturing the ink cartridges. Namely, when there is a displacement, due to manufacturing error, in the mounting position of the elastic wave generating means 2003 against the ink cartridge, contact deficiency between the elastic wave generating means 2003 and the terminals provided in the ink-jet recording apparatus will not occur. Thus, a tolerance is created in the mounting position of the elastic wave generating means 2003 against the ink cartridge.

45 [0316] Figs. 80B and 80C show embodiments where the elastic wave generating means are arranged in the ink supply port 2. Referring to Fig. 80B, the elastic wave generating means 2003a and 2003b maybe provided in an outer wall of the ink supply port 2. Referring to Fig. 80C, the elastic wave generating means 2003c and 2003d may be provided in an inner wall of the ink supply port 2. As in the elastic wave generating means 2003a and 2003b, when arranged in the outer wall of the supply port 2, the supply port 2 is preferably of a cylindrical shape so as to have the outer wall. Moreover, it suffices to provide one of the elastic wave generating means 2003a, 2003b, 2003c and 2003d.

50 [0317] Moreover, the elastic wave generating means 2003a can detect the consumption state of ink inside the container 3 and whether or not the ink is present in the ink supply port 2 can also be detected. Thus, by providing the elastic wave generating means in the position of the elastic wave generating means 2003a, the ink consumption state can be detected in a step-by-step manner by a single elastic wave generating means.

55 [0318] Each of the elastic wave generating means 2003a, 2003b, 2003c and 2003d is preferably extended from one end of the cartridge in the inner side to the other end of the cartridge in the outer end.

[0319] Fig. 81 is a cross sectional view of major parts of the ink-jet recording apparatus suitable for the ink cartridge shown in Figs. 77 - 80A. A carriage 30 capable of reciprocating in the cross direction of the printing paper comprises the sub-tank unit 33, and the recording head 31 is provided in the lower face of the sub-tank unit 33. The ink supply needle 32 is provided in an ink cartridge mounting side of the sub-tank unit 33.

5 [0320] Fig. 82 shows a cross sectional view of an embodiment of the ink-jet recording apparatus according to the present invention. A carriage 250 capable of reciprocating in the cross direction of the printing paper includes a recording head 252 in the lower face. The carriage 250 includes a sub-tank unit 256 in the upper face of the recording head 252. The sub-tank unit 256 has a similar structure to that of the sub-tank unit 33. The sub-tank unit 256 includes an ink supply needle 254 in an ink cartridge mounting side. The ink supply needle 254 is inserted to the ink supply port of the
10 ink cartridge, and supplies ink from the ink cartridge to the recording head 252. The elastic wave generating means may be provided in the sub-tank unit 256 instead of being provided in the ink cartridge. For example, as shown in Fig. 82, the elastic wave generating means 2003a may be arranged in a face adjacent to a face having the ink supply port. Moreover, though not shown, the elastic wave generating means may be arranged in a face having the ink supply port
15 of the sub-tank unit 256. Moreover, as shown in Fig. 82, the elastic wave generating means 2003b may be arranged inside the ink supply port of the sub-tank unit 256. In any case, the elastic wave generating means is preferably situated in the vicinity of the ink supply port of the sub-tank unit 256.

[0321] Fig. 83 shows an embodiment of the ink cartridge where actuators 2106a and 2106b are provided on the ink supply port 2. Fig. 83A shows an ink cartridge according to the present embodiment viewed from the latitudinal direction or vertically in the cross direction of the ink cartridge.

20 [0322] Moreover, the actuator 2106 may be mounted to the ink cartridge which houses plural types of ink. For example, the actuator 2106, as a substitute of the elastic wave generating means 2003, may be arranged at the point P where the elastic wave generating means 2003 is positioned. However, in the case of providing the actuator 2106, it is preferable that an opening be provided in the ink cartridge in order that the actuator 2106 can come in contact the ink.

25 [0323] Namely, according to embodiments of the liquid container according to the present invention, the liquid container comprises a container which houses the liquid and which has a corner portion in a lower side against the liquid surface of the liquid, a liquid supply port which supplies the liquid to the exterior of the container, and a piezoelectric device which detects the consumption state of the liquid and which is provided in the corner portion or in the vicinity of the corner portion. Preferably, the container has a base wall in the lower side against the liquid surface of the liquid, and the piezoelectric device is arranged in the base wall.

30 [0324] Fig. 84 shows still another embodiment of the ink cartridge according to the present invention. The ink cartridge according to the present embodiment has a slanted face 3040 where the corner portion 3001 is tilted against the liquid surface of ink. The actuator 3106 is provided in the slanted face 3040. Thus, the actuator 3106 is provided in a manner that it is tilted with respect to the liquid surface of ink. In the embodiment shown in Fig. 84, there is provided a through hole 1c on a plane face. Thus, it is relatively easy to provide the through hole 1c in the embodiment shown in
35 Fig. 84. When the actuator 3106 is arranged away from the base wall 1a of the container, the ink remains between the actuator 3106 and the base wall 1a when the actuator 3106 detects gas or the liquid surface of ink. On the other hand, when the actuator 3106 is arranged in the corner portion, the actuator 3106 can be provided in the vicinity of the base wall 1a. Thus, when the actuator 3106 detects gas or the liquid surface of ink, the level of liquid surface of ink is almost equal to the base wall.

40 [0325] Fig. 85 shows a cross sectional view of still another embodiment of the ink cartridge in the latitudinal direction. The container 1 of the ink cartridge according to the present embodiment includes enclosing side walls 1020a and 1020b which enclose the supply port forming wall 3010 (see Fig. 84) and the opposed side wall 3015 (see Fig. 84). Moreover, the ink supply port 2 is provided in a leaning manner. In the present embodiment, the actuator 3106 is provided in the corner portion 3001a situated in a boundary region between the base wall 1a and the enclosing side wall
45 1020a. Thus, even when the ink cartridge is tilted in the cross direction (in the direction of arrow mark Z) in Fig. 85, the actuator 3106 can detect the situation where there is no ink left in the container 1 after it is consumed out completely. Moreover, the actuator 3106 may be provided in the corner portion 3001b. Thereby, even when the ink cartridge is tilted in the reverse direction of the arrow mark Z, the actuator 3106 can detect the situation where there is no ink left in the container 1 after it is consumed out completely.

50 [0326] Fig. 86 shows an embodiment of the ink cartridge using two actuators. An embodiment where two actuators are used in the ink cartridge according to the present invention will be described. In the present embodiment, the actuators 3106a and 3106b are arranged in the corner portions 3001a and 3001b of the opposed side wall 1015, respectively. The actuators 3106a and 3106b are both arranged in approximately same height to each other with respect to the liquid surface of ink in the container 1. Thereby, when the liquid surface of ink reaches a predetermined liquid level,
55 both the actuators 3106a and 3106b almost simultaneously detect it. Thus, ink consumption state can be highly reliably detected.

[0327] Moreover, when the ink cartridge is tilted in the cross direction, one of the actuators 3106a and 3106b detects first that there is no ink as the ink in the container 1 is gradually consumed. Thus, if the actuators 3106a and

3106b detect that there is no ink in a different timing or if one of actuators detects accordingly, it can be judged that the ink cartridge is tilted. Moreover, instead of providing the actuators 3106a and 3106b almost in the same height with respect to the liquid surface of ink as in the present embodiment, the actuators may be provided at different height to each other. By providing the actuators 3106a and 3106b at different height with respect to the liquid surface of ink, the ink in the container 1 can be detected in a step-by-step manner. Moreover, the consumption state of ink can be detected with high reliability.

[0328] Fig. 87A is a perspective view showing still another embodiment of the actuator. In the present embodiment, the actuator 3670 comprises a concave part forming base plate 80 and a piezoelectric element 82. In one side of the concave part forming base plate 80, an concave part 81 is formed by an etching method or the like while on other side 10 the piezoelectric element 82 is mounted. In the concave part forming base plate 80, a bottom portion of the concave part 81 operates as a vibrating region. Thus, the vibrating region of the actuator 3670 is defined by a periphery of the concave part 81. Moreover, the structure of the actuator 3670 is analogous to that which is formed integrally with the base plate 178 and the vibrating plate 176 as found in the actuator 106. Therefore, the manufacturing process in manufacturing the ink cartridges can be shortened, so that the cost therefor can be reduced. Moreover, the side face of the actuator 3670 has a tapering face 3083 which is tilted by a tilt angle θ1.

[0329] Referring to Figs. 87B and 87C, the actuator 3670 fills up the through hole provided in the container 1. Thus, the vibrating region of the actuator 3670 can come in contact with the ink contained in the container 1. Moreover, the concave part 81 can operate as a cavity.

[0330] Moreover, the actuator 106 may be formed in a similar manner to the actuator 3670 of Figs. 87A - 87C such 20 that it fills up the through hole of the container 1.

[0331] In the present embodiment shown in Fig. 87B, the actuator 3670 is mounted from outside the container 1. However, the actuator 3670 and the container 1 may be so designed that it can be mounted from inside the container 1 as in the embodiment shown in Fig. 87C. Moreover, the actuator 3670 may be arranged in the container 1 by embedding it in the through hole provided in the container 1. In any case, the container 1 and the actuator 3670 are kept in a 25 fluid-tight state.

[0332] The container 1 in the ink cartridge according to the embodiment shown in Fig. 87B has a cutting plane 90 in the corner portion 3001 located between the bottom wall 1a and the opposed side wall 1015, which is tilted with respect to the bottom wall 1a by a tilt angle θ2. The actuator 3670 is mounted in the cutting plane 90, so that the vibrating region 82 can come contact with ink inside the container 1 and the interior of the container 1 can be kept in a fluid-tight state. It is preferable that the tilt angle θ1 of the tapering face 3083 be equal to the tilt angle θ2 of the cutting plane 30. Thereby, the bottom wall 1a or the opposed side wall 1015 and the tapering face 3083 can be formed into the same plane.

[0333] Moreover, the container 1 in the ink cartridge according to the embodiment shown in Fig. 87C has a cutting plane 90 in the corner portion 3001 located between the bottom wall 1a and the opposed side wall 1015, which is tilted 35 with respect to the bottom wall 1a by a tilt angle θ2. The actuator 3670 is mounted in the inner wall face of the bottom wall 1a and the opposed side wall 1015 of the container 1. Thereby, the vibrating region 82 can come contact with ink inside the container 1 and the interior of the container 1 can be kept in a fluid-tight state. It is preferable that the tilt angle θ1 of the tapering face 3083 be equal to the tilt angle θ2 of the cutting plane 90. Thereby, the cutting plane 90 and the bottom face 91 of the actuator 3670 can be formed into the same plane.

[0334] The module 3500 is mounted to the corner portion 3001 in the boundary located between the bottom wall 1a and the opposed side wall 1015 of the container 1. An O ring 3365 is provided so as to keep the module 3500 and the container 1 in a fluid-tight manner.

[0335] In the present embodiment shown in Fig. 88, since the actuator 3106 is arranged approximately vertical to the liquid surface of ink, the vibrating region of the actuator 3106 can be positioned approximately vertical to the liquid 45 surface of ink. By forming the vibrating region of the actuator 3106 in an elongating manner in the vertical direction with respect to the liquid surface of ink, the actuator 3106 can detect the process in which the liquid surface of ink decreases.

[0336] Moreover, the liquid container according to the present invention can detect when the liquid level of the liquid reaches the bottom face of the container, so that the liquid inside the liquid container can be consumed out completely until the last stage of the ink consumption.

[0337] Although the present invention has been described by way of exemplary embodiments, it should be understood that many changes and substitutions may be made by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and the scope of the present invention which is defined only by the appended claims. For example, some embodiments described above employ the actuator whereas the others the elastic wave generating means. However, the substitution of those two devices can easily be realized as the present invention mainly concerns the position of a liquid level or ink 55 level detection device.

Claims

1. A liquid container, comprising:

5 a housing containing therein liquid;
 a liquid supply opening formed in said housing through which liquid is supplied to the outside of said housing;
 and
 a detection device having a piezoelectric element and attached on said housing, said detection device detects
 10 a consumption degree of level of liquid contained in said housing.

10 2. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said detection device comprises an elongating vibration region
 for actually detecting a continuous decline of the liquid level.

15 3. The liquid container according to claim 2, wherein said elongating vibration region extends in a vertical direction
 with respect to the liquid level.

20 4. The liquid container according to claim 3, wherein a lower end of said vibration region substantially reaches a bot-
 tom face of said housing.

25 5. The liquid container according to claim 4, wherein an upper end of said vibration region substantially reaches a top
 face of said housing.

6. The liquid container according to claim 4, wherein said vibration region has a length equal to or more than a half of
 a distance from the bottom face to a top face of said housing.

25 7. The liquid container according to claim 2, wherein said vibration region is slanted with respect to the liquid level.

8. The liquid container according to claim 7, wherein said housing comprises a slant face with respect to the liquid
 level, and said detection device is attached on said slant face.

30 9. The liquid container according to claim 2, wherein a lower end of said vibration region positions on a plane where
 said liquid supply opening opens.

35 10. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said detection device comprises a plurality of detection members
 each having a piezoelectric element, said detection members are arranged in a direction which the liquid contained
 in said housing decreases.

11. The liquid container according to claim 10, wherein a distance between the lower two adjacent detection members
 is smaller than that between the upper two.

40 12. The liquid container according to claim 10, wherein said housing comprises a slant face with respect to the liquid
 level, and said plurality of detection members are arranged at interval on the slant face.

45 13. The liquid container according to claim 12, wherein said slant face is formed in the vicinity of said liquid supply
 opening, and a distance between the two adjacent detection devices closer to said liquid supply opening is shorter
 than the two far from said liquid supply opening.

14. The liquid container according to claim 10, wherein said plurality of detection members are arranged on a single
 coupling member which is attached to said housing.

50 15. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said detection device is disposed in the vicinity of said liquid sup-
 ply opening.

16. The liquid container according to claim 15, wherein said detection device is disposed in said liquid supply opening.

55 17. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said detection device is formed with a cavity which opens to an
 interior of said housing, said cavity contacts liquid contained in said housing.

18. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said detection device comprises a mounting structure formed integrally with said piezoelectric element, and said mounting structure is attached on said housing.
- 5 19. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein each of said plurality of detection members comprises a mounting module formed integrally with the respective piezoelectric element.
20. The liquid container according to claim 10, wherein said plurality of detection members comprise a single mounting module formed integrally with a plurality of the respective piezoelectric elements.
- 10 21. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said detection device generates a counter-electromotive voltage in accordance with a residual vibration of the piezoelectric element.
22. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein said detection device detects a change of an acoustic impedance of the liquid surrounding said detection device and detect a consumption degree of level of liquid contained in said housing based on said detected change of an acoustic impedance.
- 15 23. The liquid container according to claim 1, wherein the liquid container is an ink cartridge mounted on an ink jet printer.
- 20 24. A method of detecting a consumption status of liquid contained in a liquid container on the basis of a vibration status of a detection device having a piezoelectric element, comprising steps of:
preparing a detection device having a plurality of detecting positions;
mounting the detection device on the liquid container;
switching a detecting point to at least one of the plurality of detecting position of the detection device in a direction of a change of the liquid level while consuming the liquid; and
detecting the liquid level by operating the detection device.
- 25 25. The method according to claim 24, wherein the detection device detecting the liquid level more frequently as the liquid level goes down.
- 30 26. The method according to claim 24, wherein said detection device preparing device comprises a plurality of detection member each having a piezoelectric element, and said switching step comprises a step of switching a detection member to be operated to the next one when the current detection member detects a no-liquid condition.
- 35 27. The method according to claim 26, wherein said detection step comprises a step of operating only the detecting elements which do not detect a no-liquid condition.
- 40 28. A method of detecting a level of liquid contained in a liquid container by operating a detection device having a piezoelectric element, the method comprising steps of:
arranging a plurality of detecting points on the liquid container in a direction of a change of the liquid level while consuming the liquid;
operating the detection device; and
judging the liquid level by detecting no-ink status of each of said plurality of the detecting points.
- 45 29. The method according to claim 28, wherein the detection device comprises a plurality of detecting members each having a piezoelectric element.
- 50 30. The method according to claim 28, wherein said operation step comprises a step of operating only the detecting elements which do not detect a no-liquid condition.
31. The method according to claim 28, wherein the detection device detecting the liquid level more frequently as the liquid level goes down.
- 55 32. The method according to claim 28, wherein the plurality of the detecting points are operated from top to bottom when the liquid level is above a predetermined detection direction changing level and operated from bottom to top when the liquid level is below said predetermined detection direction changing level.

33. The method according to claim 28, wherein the operation of the detecting points stops immediately when the liquid level is judged.
- 5 34. The method according to claim 28, wherein the detection device detects a liquid consumption status on the basis of a change of an acoustic impedance of the liquid surrounding the detecting device.
- 10 35. The method according to claim 28, wherein the detection device outputs a signal representing a residual vibration status of the detection device and detects a liquid consumption status on the basis of a change of said residual vibration status which changes with a change of said liquid consumption status.
- 15 36. The method according to claim 28, wherein the liquid tank is an ink cartridge for an ink jet printer.
37. The method according to claim 36, wherein the operation of the detection device is suppressed during a printing operation of the ink jet printer.
- 20 38. The method according to claim 36, further comprising a step of executing a predetermined low-ink-amount countermeasure process when the lower most detecting point detects a no-ink status.
39. The method according to claim 38, wherein said low-ink-amount countermeasure process is executed a predetermined time period after the lower most detecting point detects the no-ink status.

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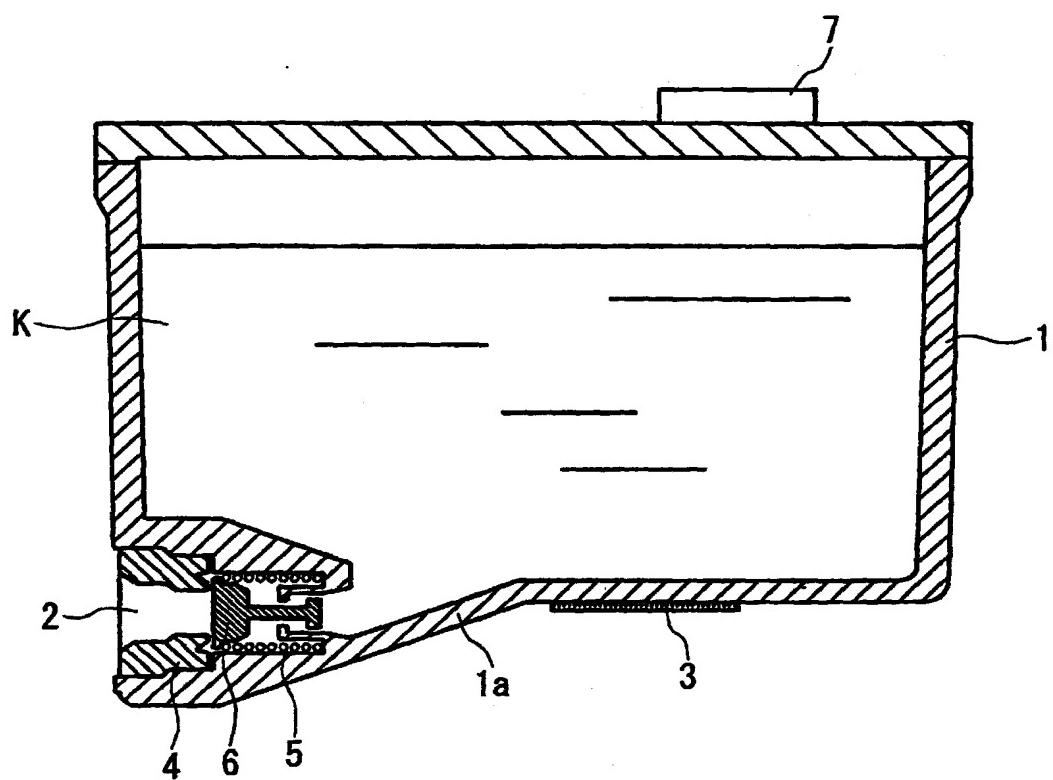


FIG. 1

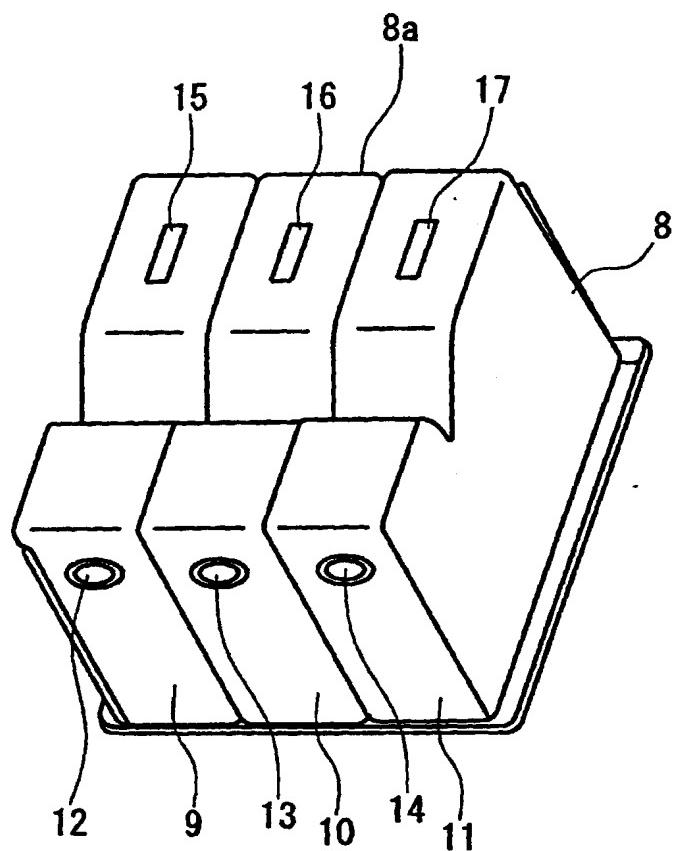


FIG. 2

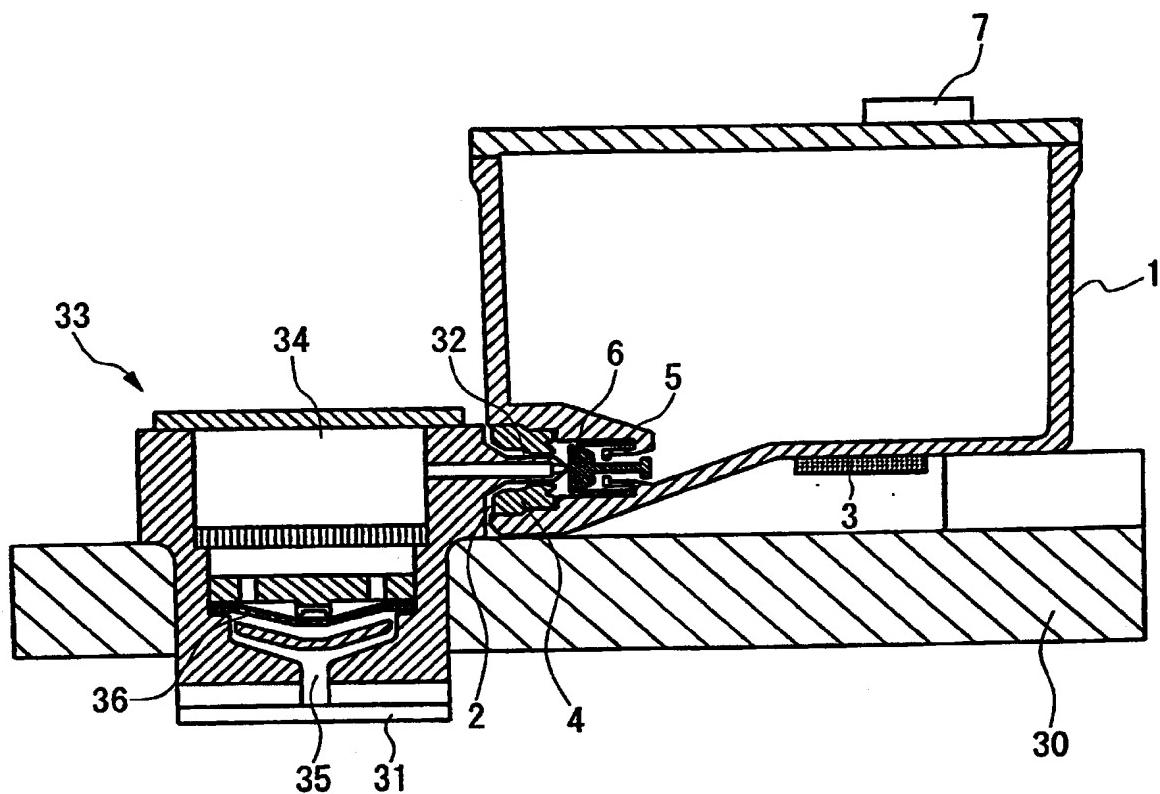


FIG. 3

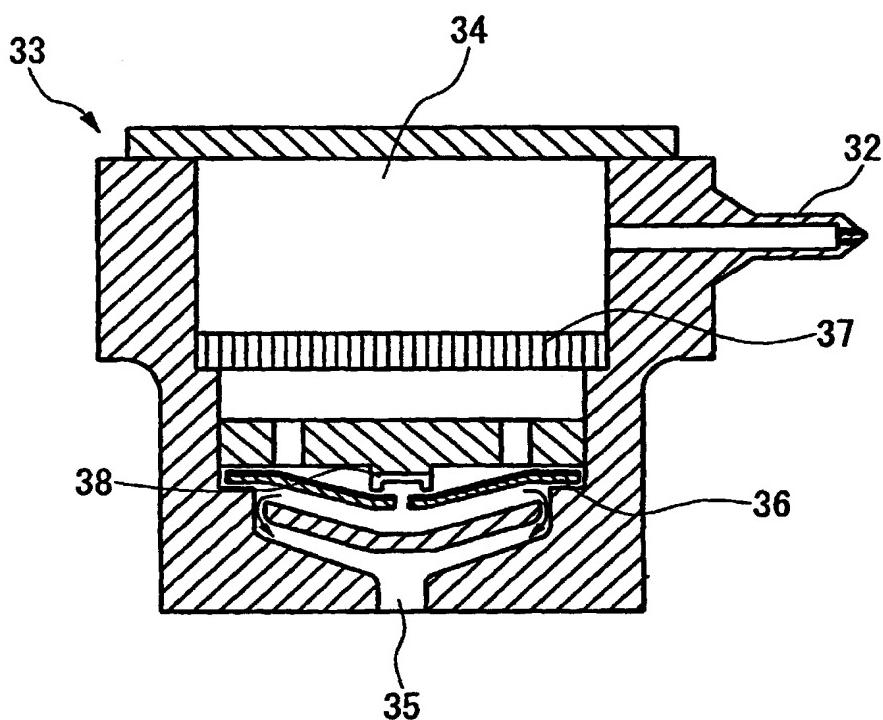


FIG. 4

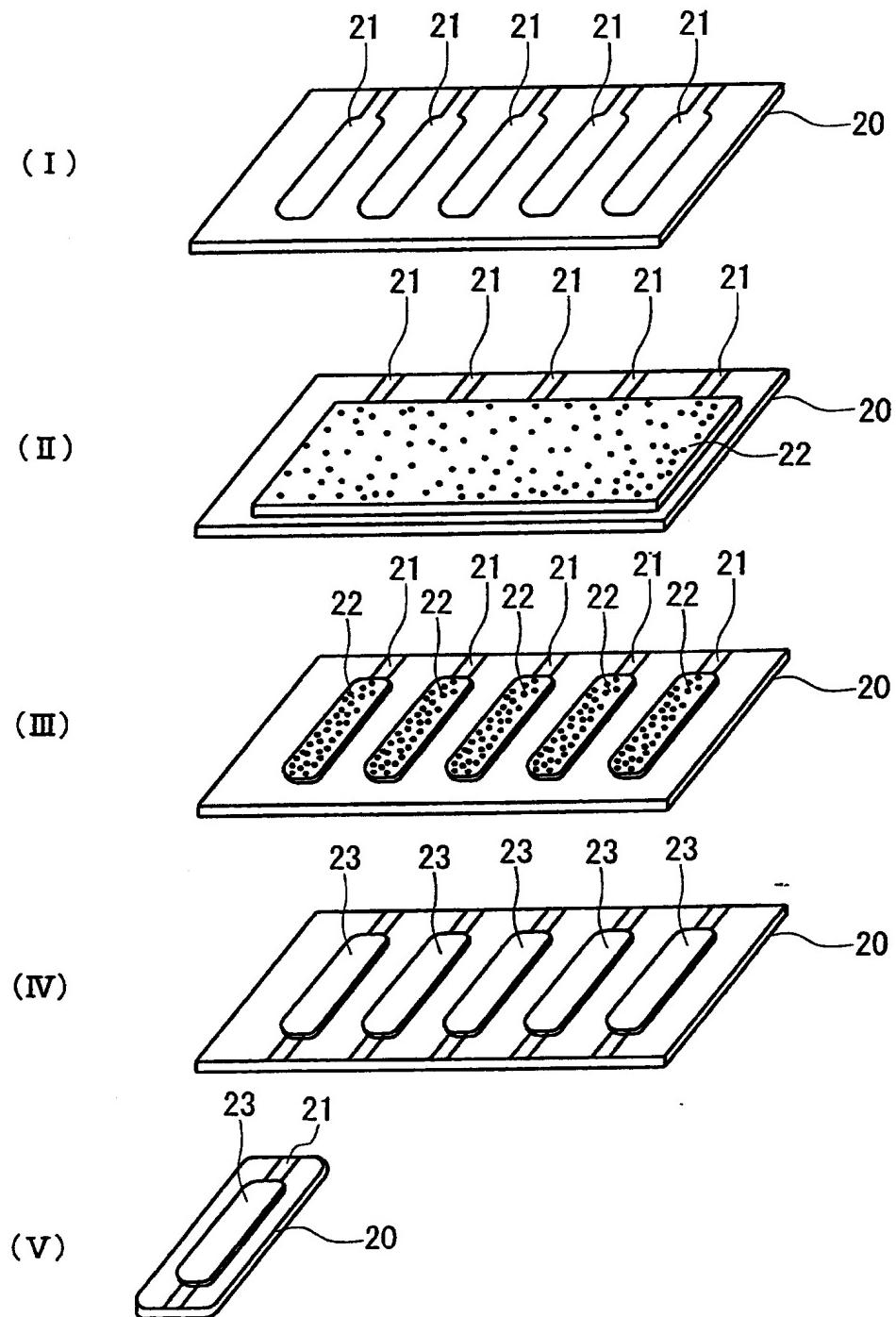
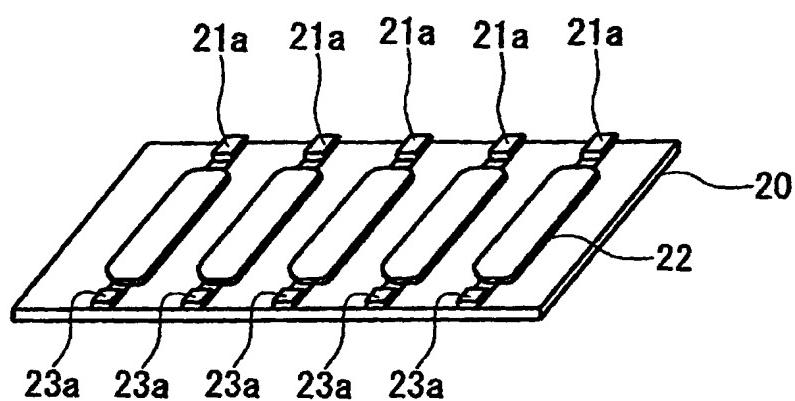


FIG 5



F / G . 6

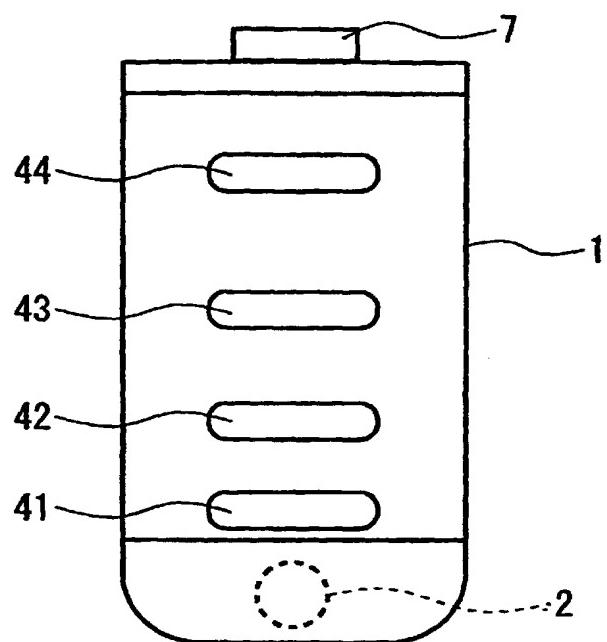


FIG. 7

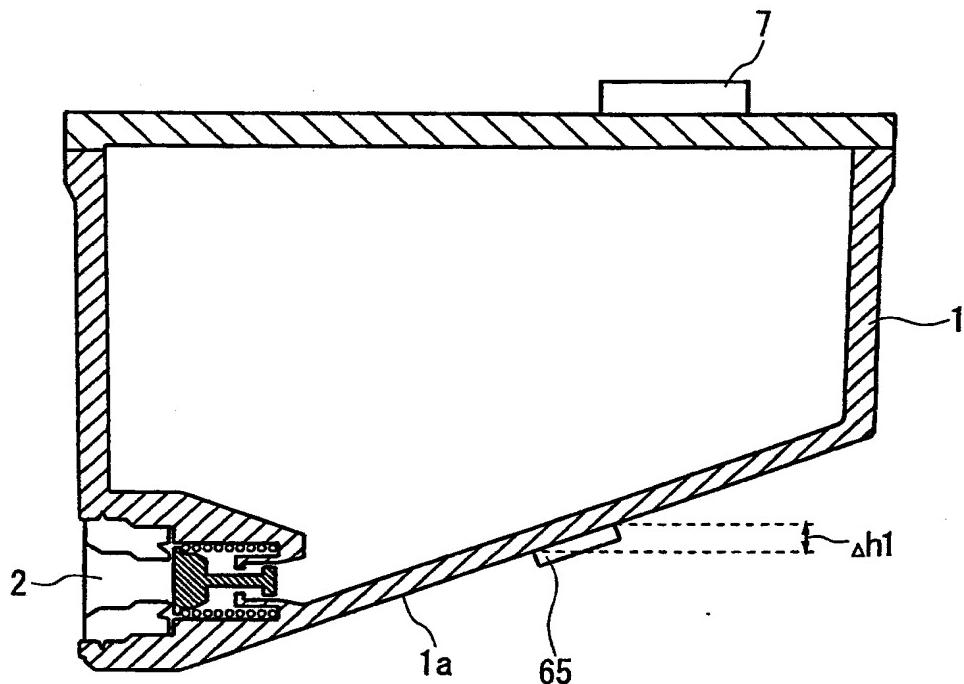


FIG. 8

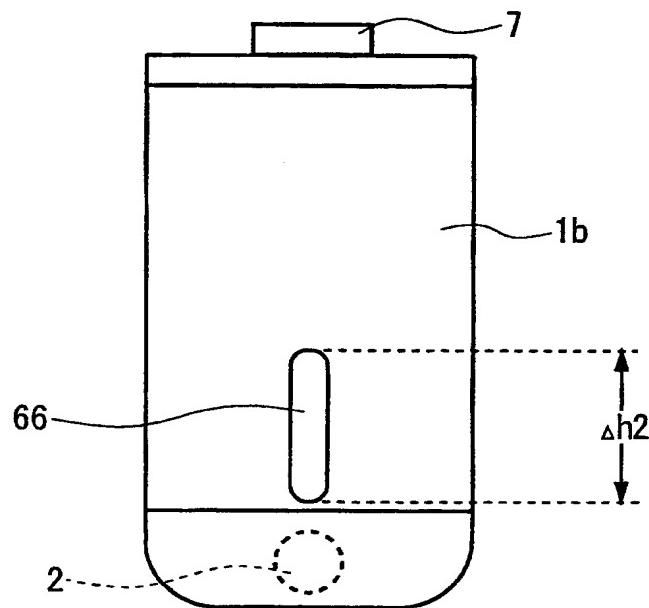


FIG. 9

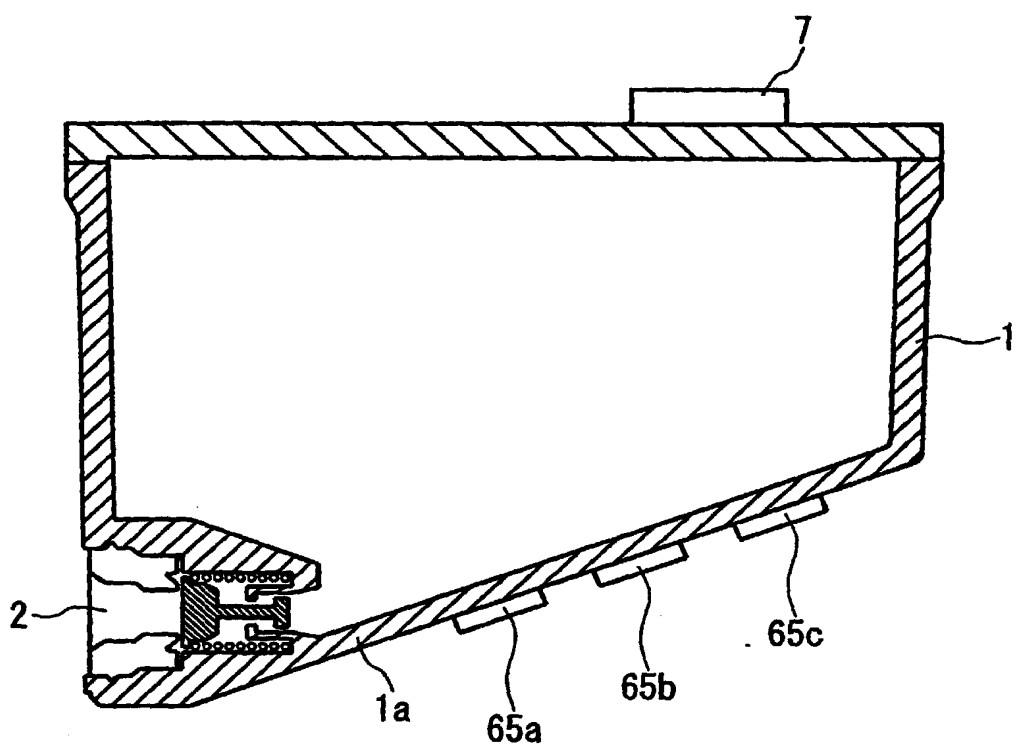
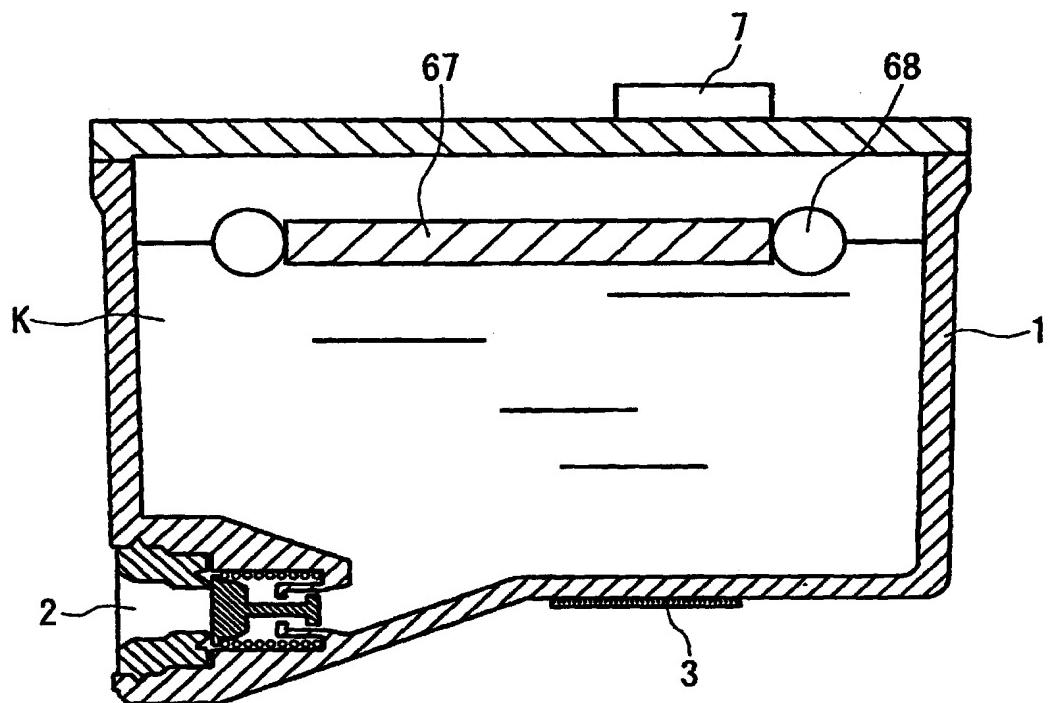


FIG. 10



F I G . 1

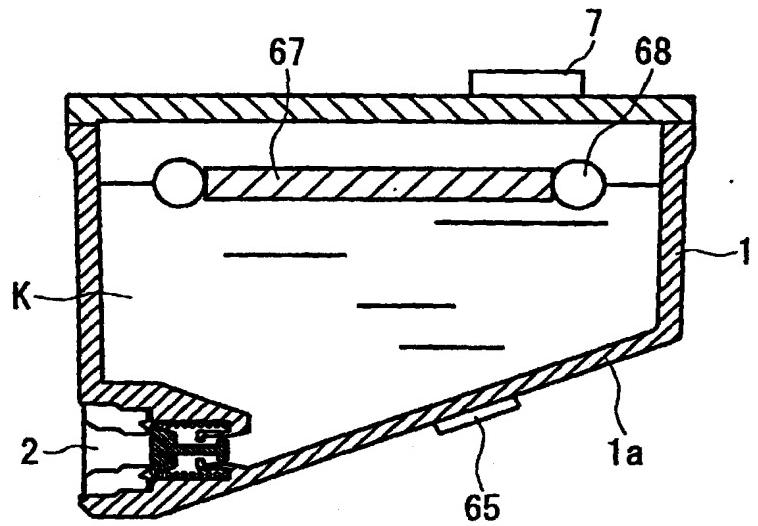


FIG. 12(A)

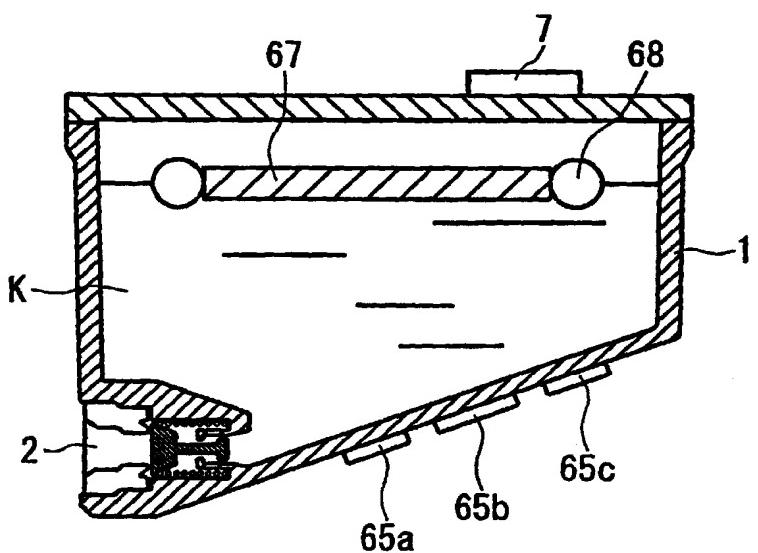


FIG. 12(B)

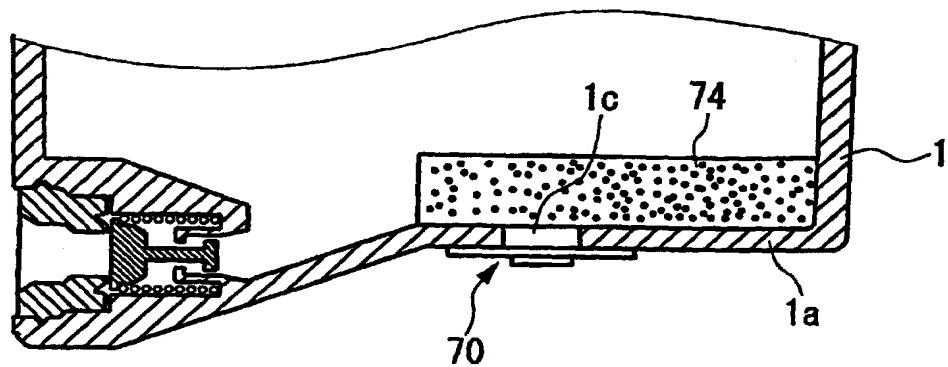


FIG. 13(A)

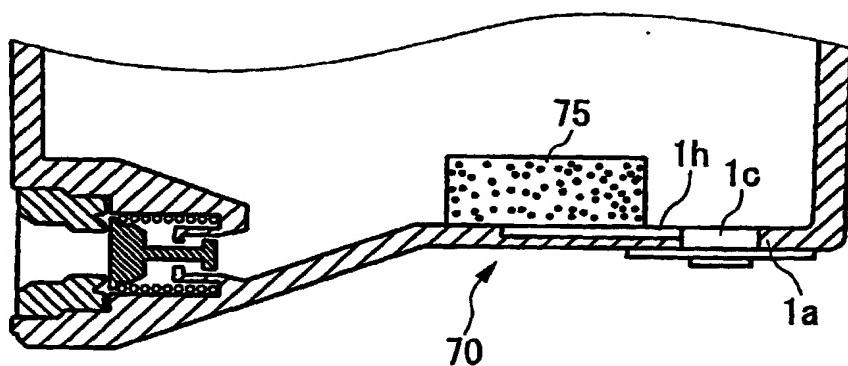


FIG. 13(B)

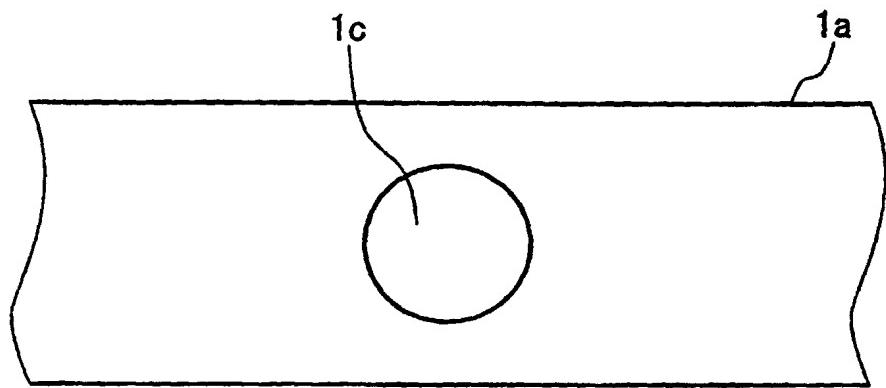


FIG. 14(A)

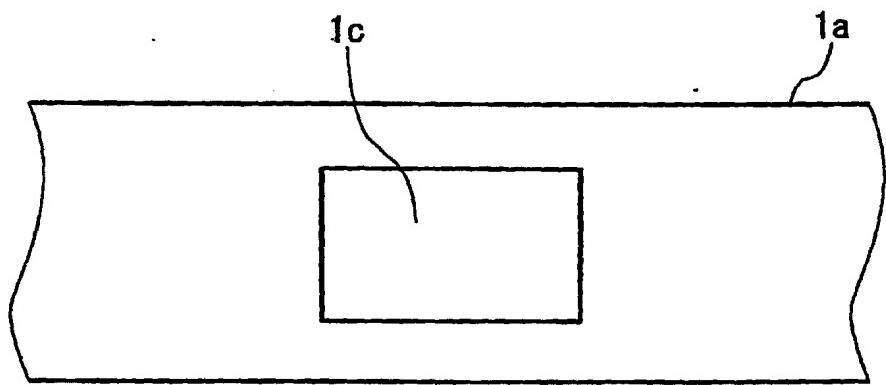


FIG. 14(B)

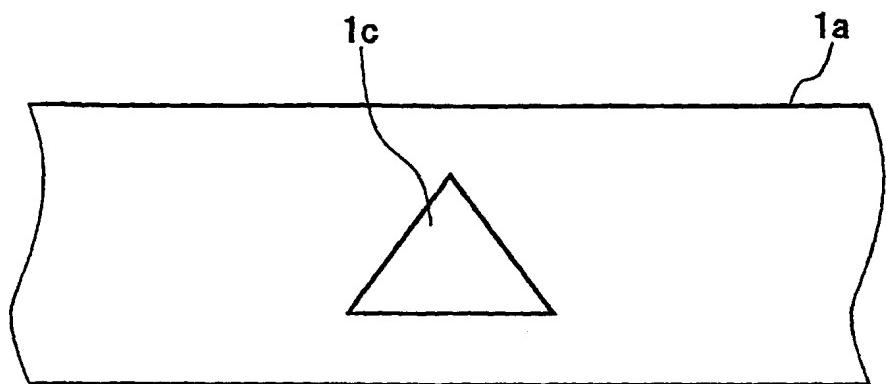


FIG. 14(C)

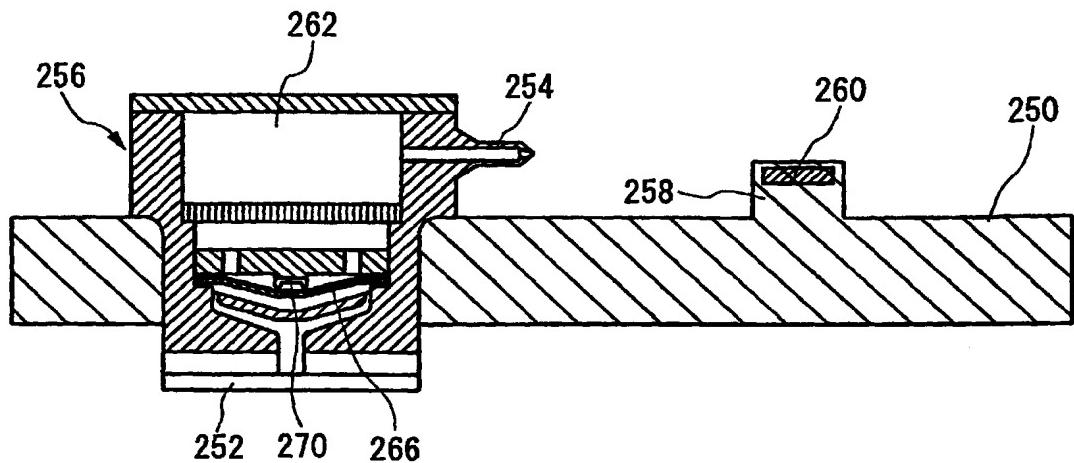


FIG. 15(A)

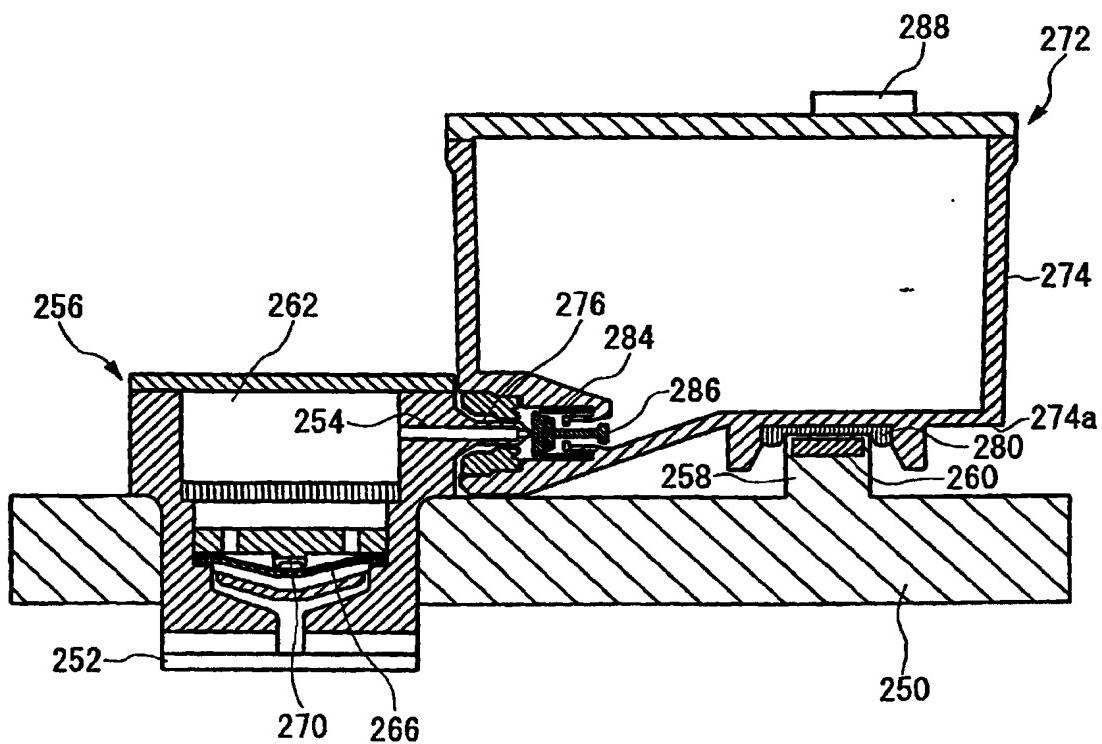


FIG. 15(B)

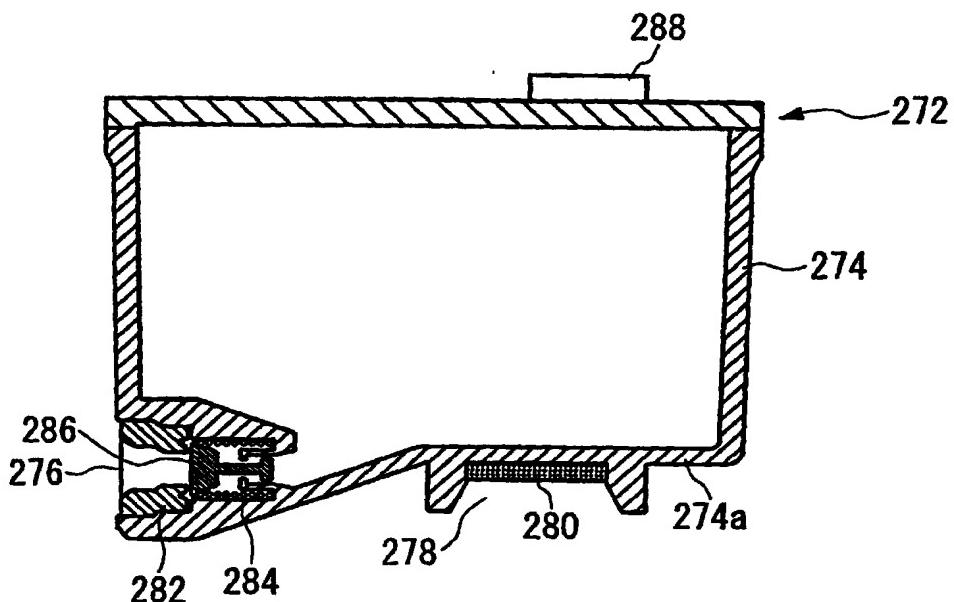


FIG. 16(A)

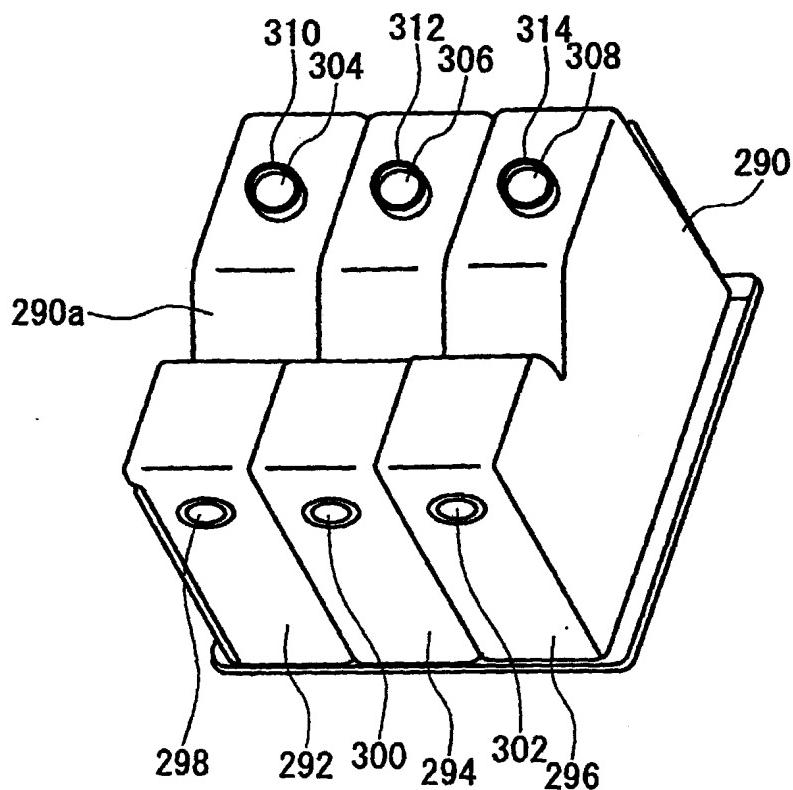


FIG. 16(B)

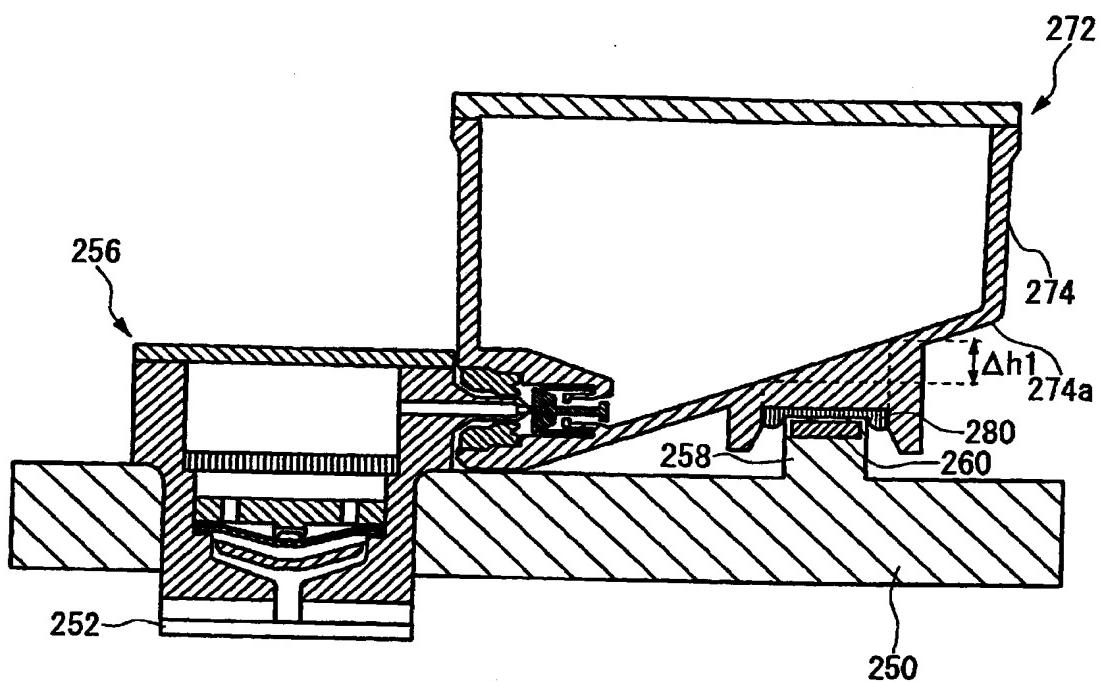


FIG. 17

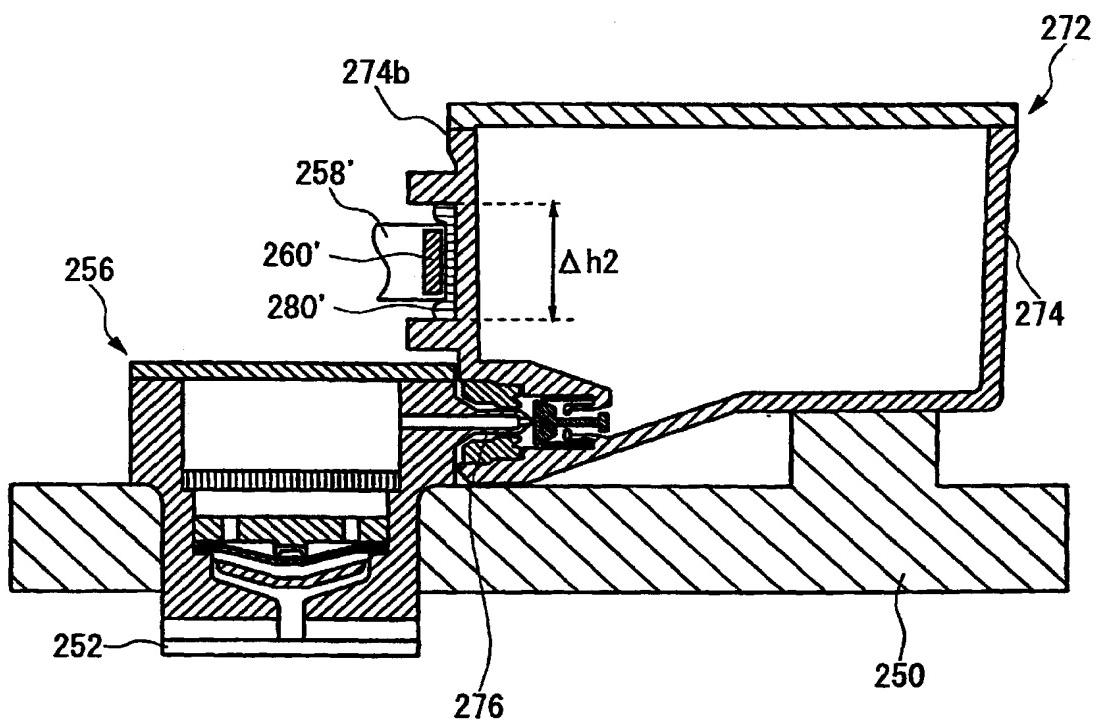


FIG. 18

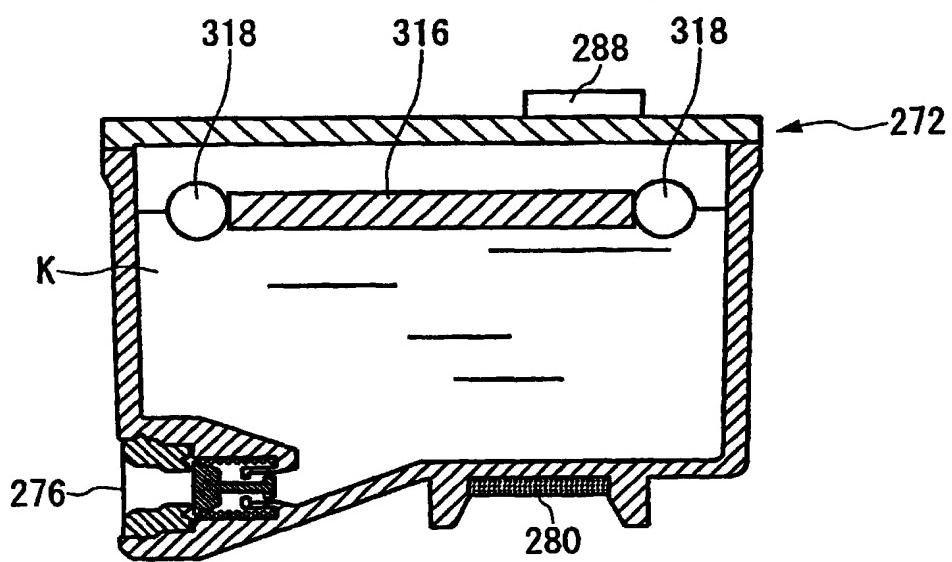


FIG. 9

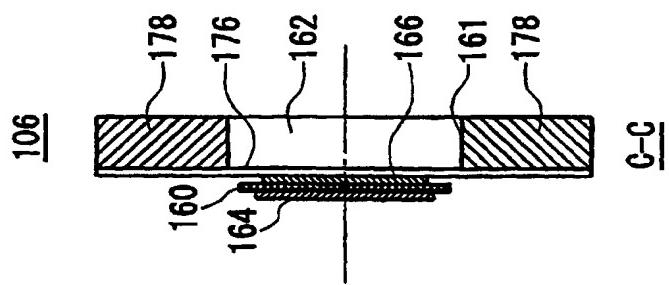


FIG. 20(C)

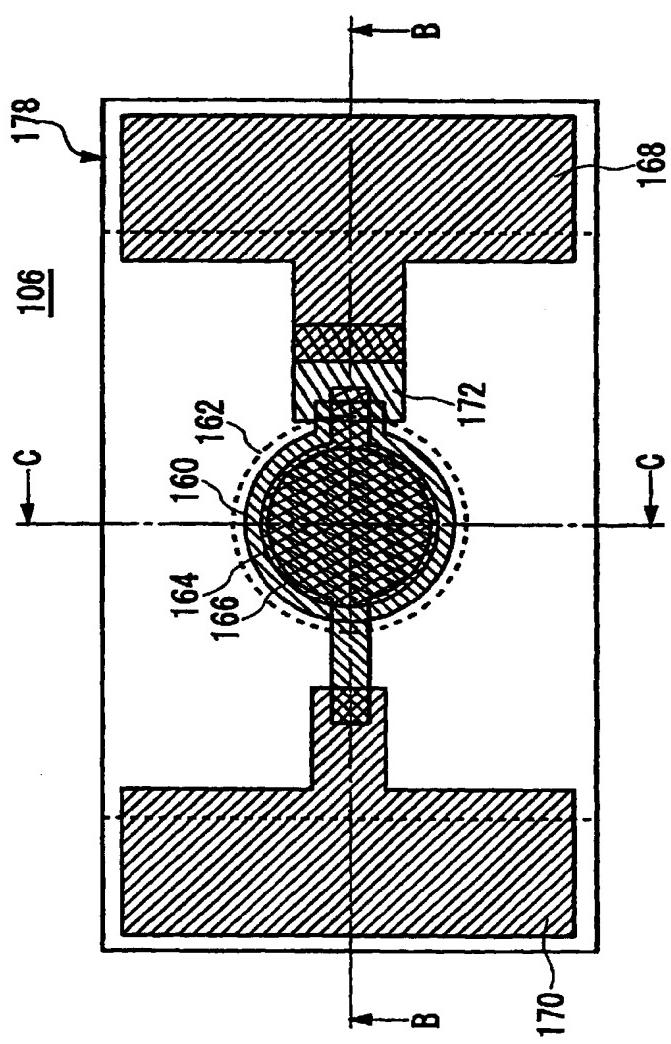


FIG. 20(A)

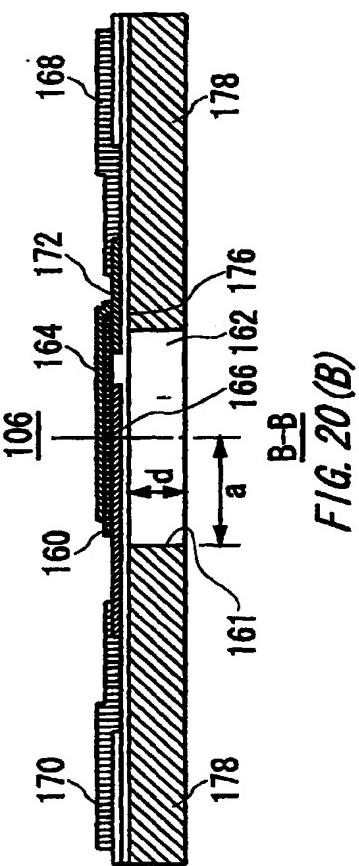


FIG. 20(B)

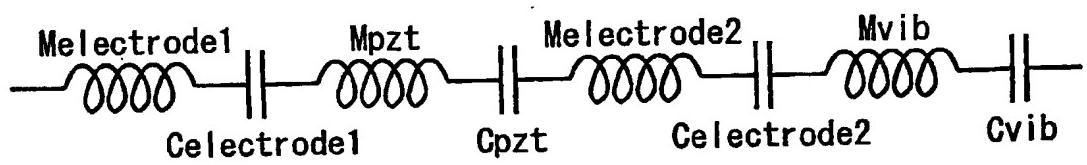


FIG. 21(A)

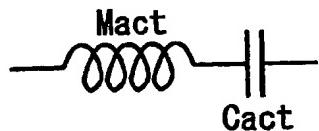


FIG. 21(B)

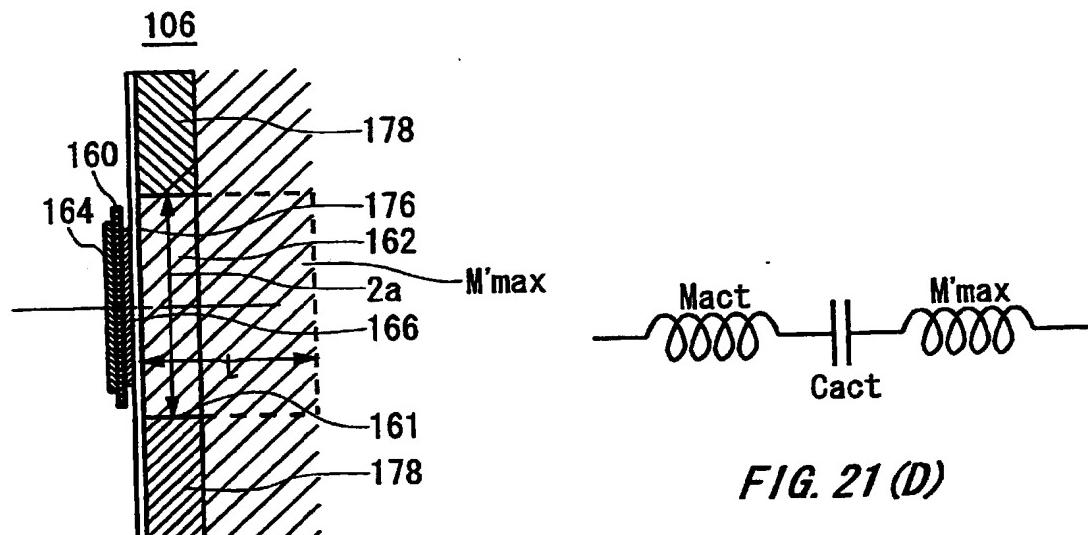


FIG. 21(C)

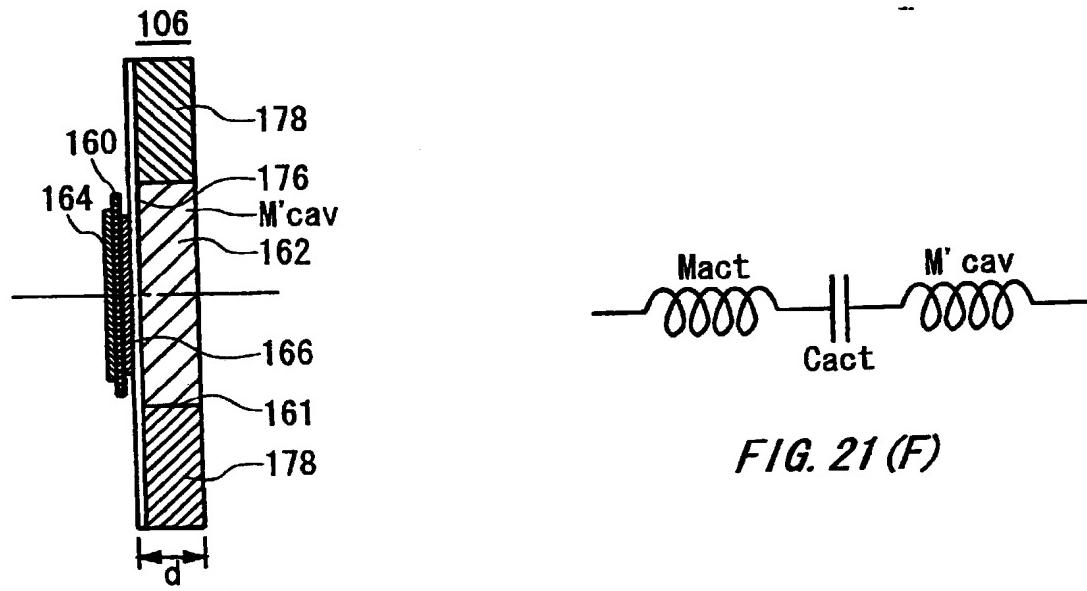


FIG. 21(E)

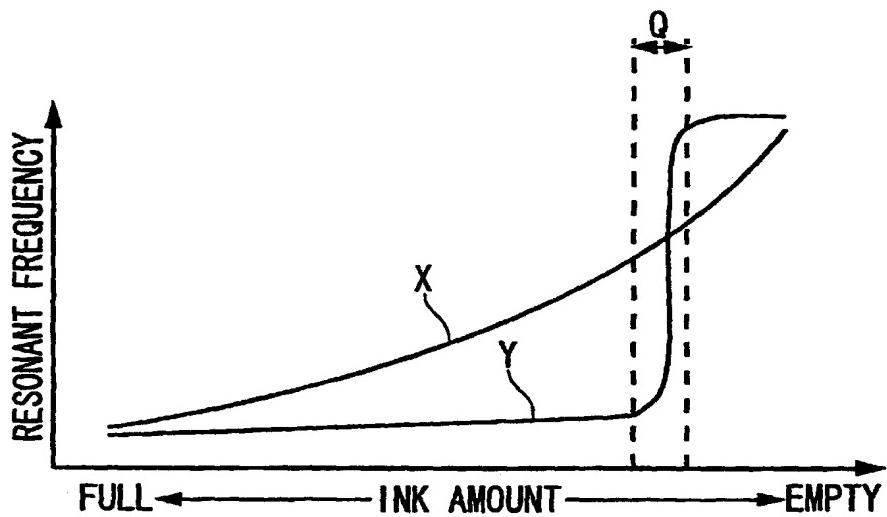


FIG. 22(A)

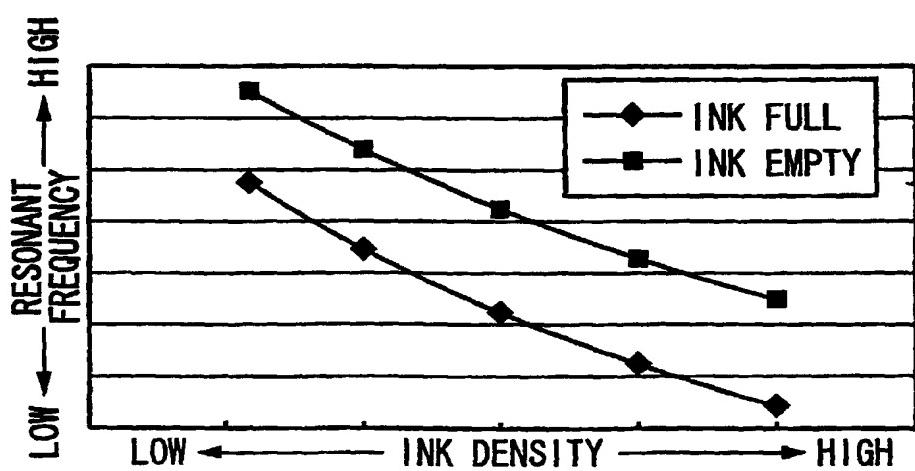


FIG. 22(B)

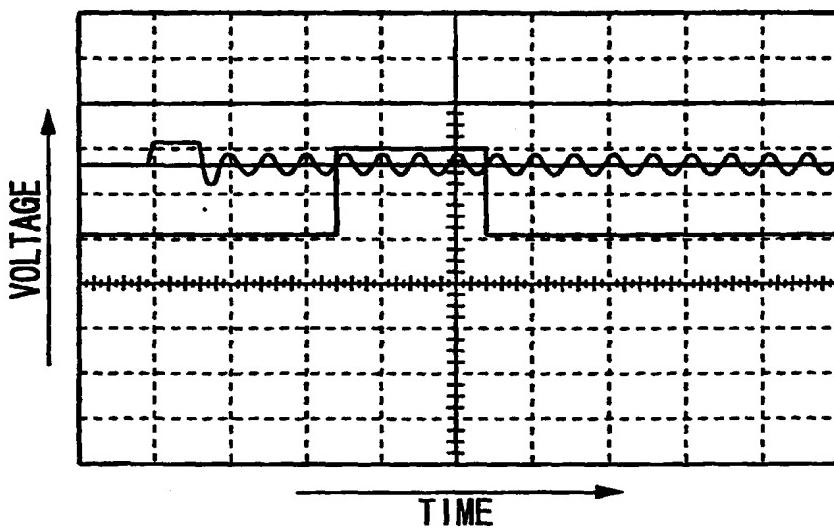


FIG. 23(A)

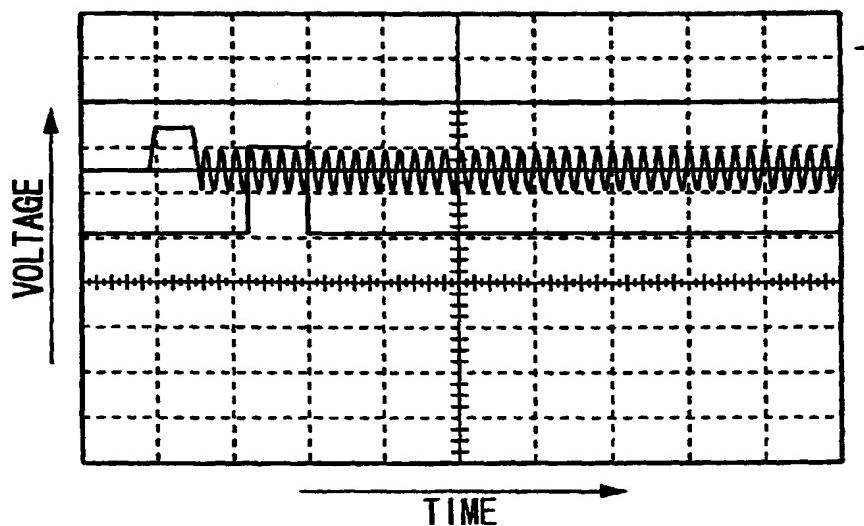
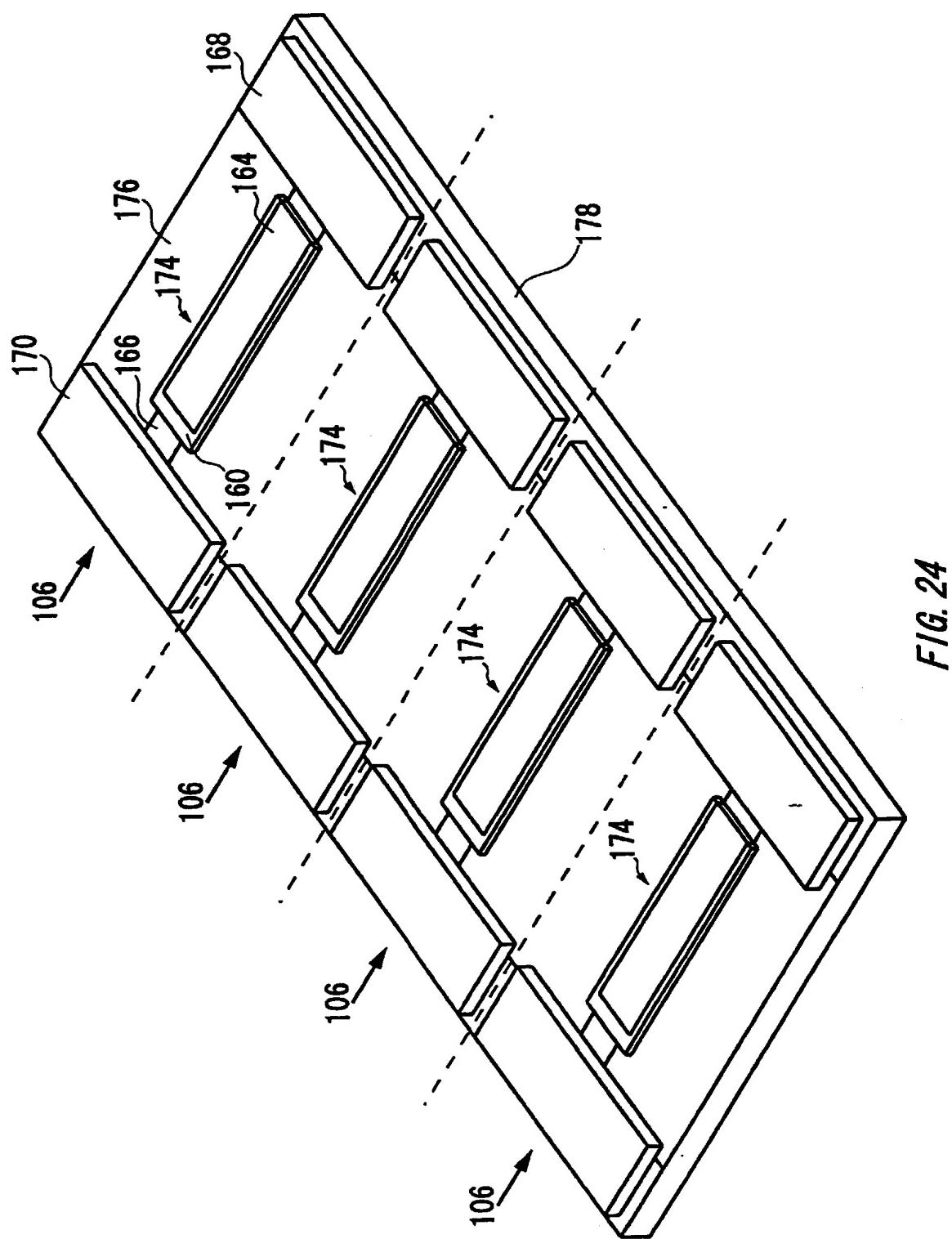


FIG. 23(B)



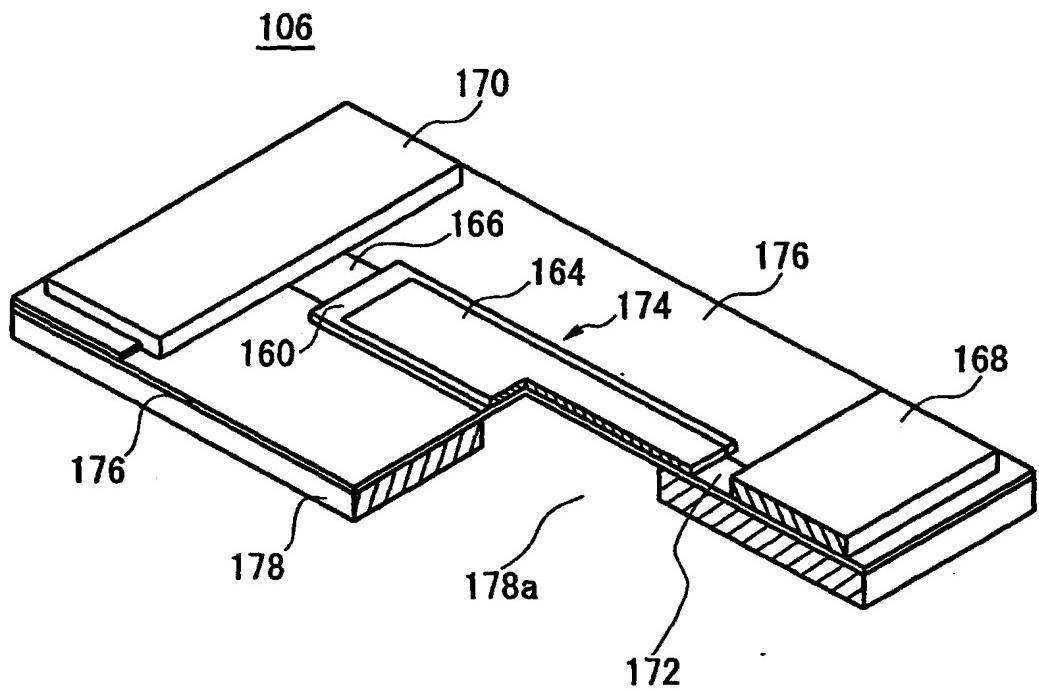


FIG. 25

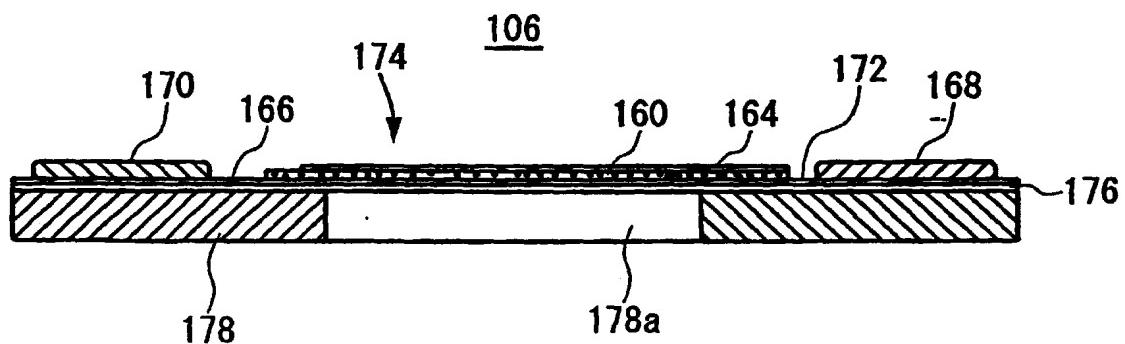


FIG. 26

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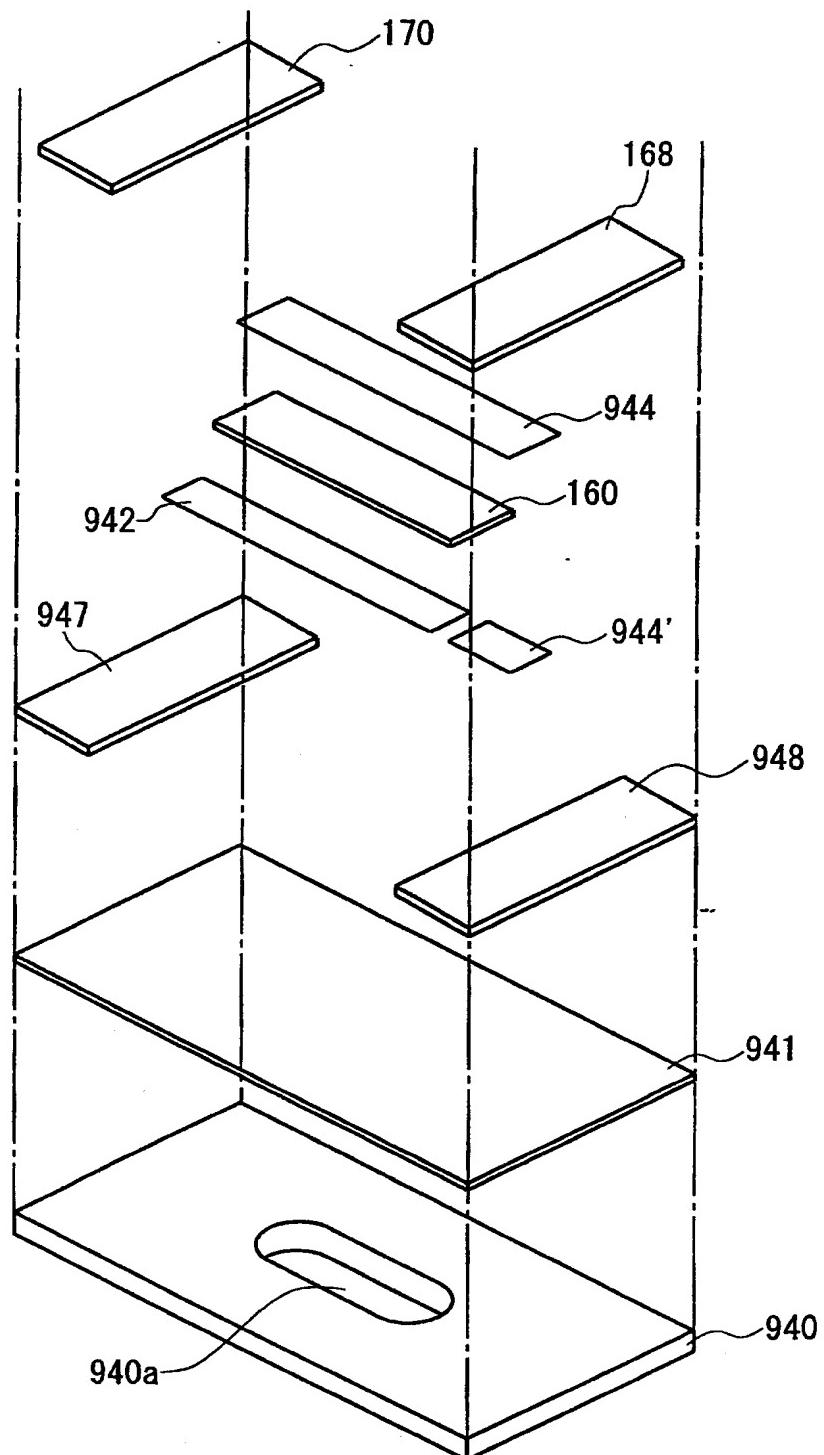


FIG 27

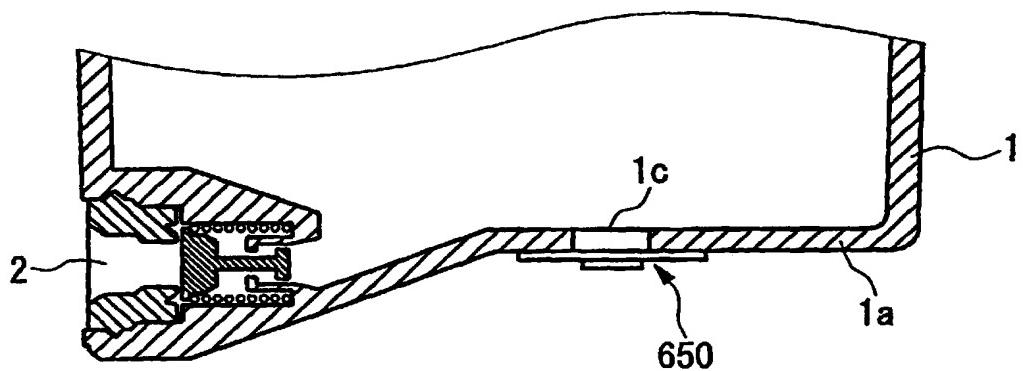


FIG. 28(A)

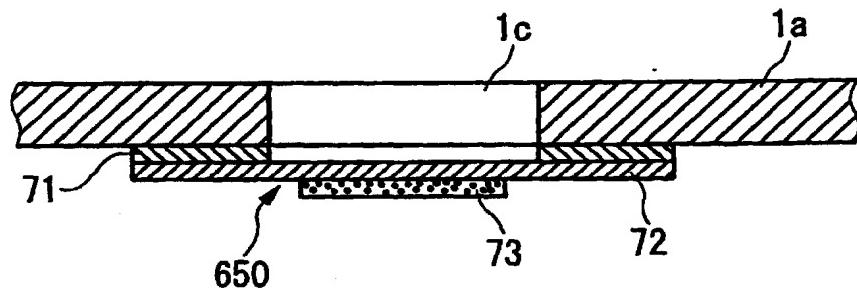


FIG. 28(B)

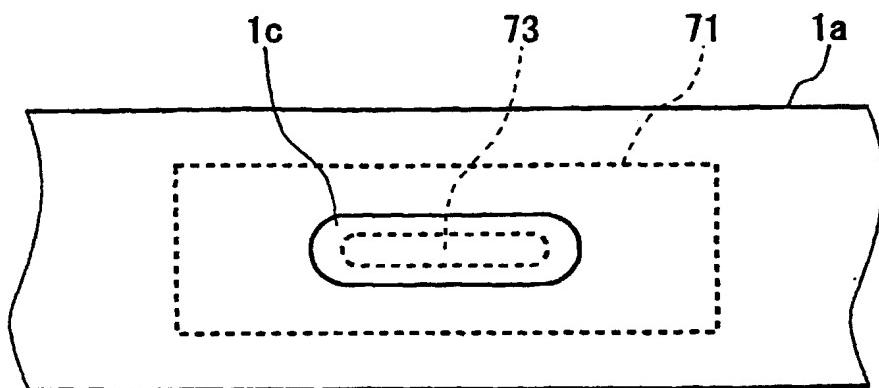


FIG. 28(C)

FIG. 29 (A)

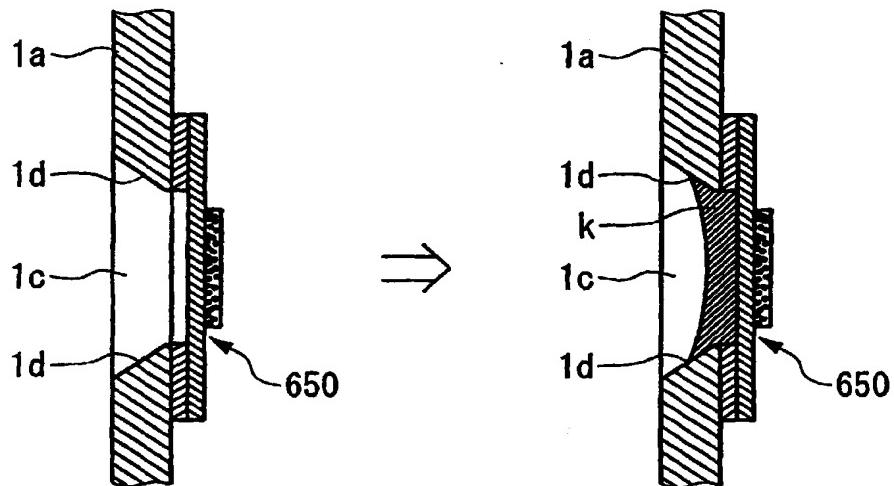


FIG. 29 (B)

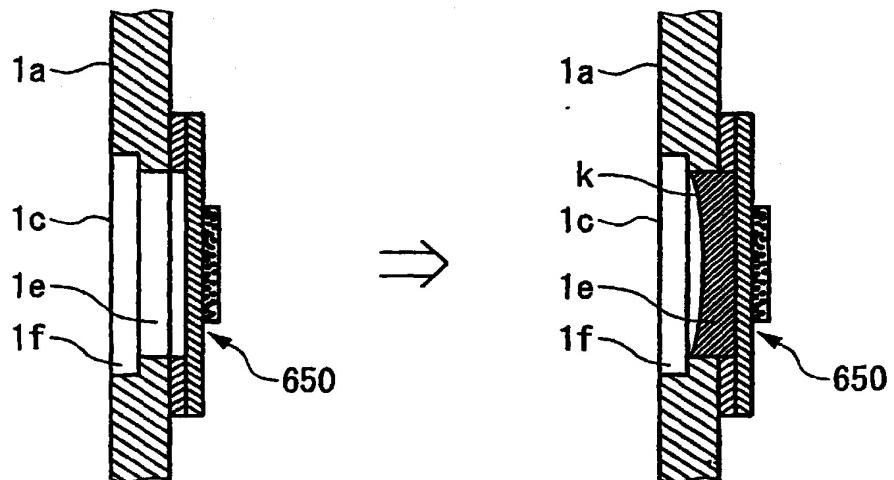
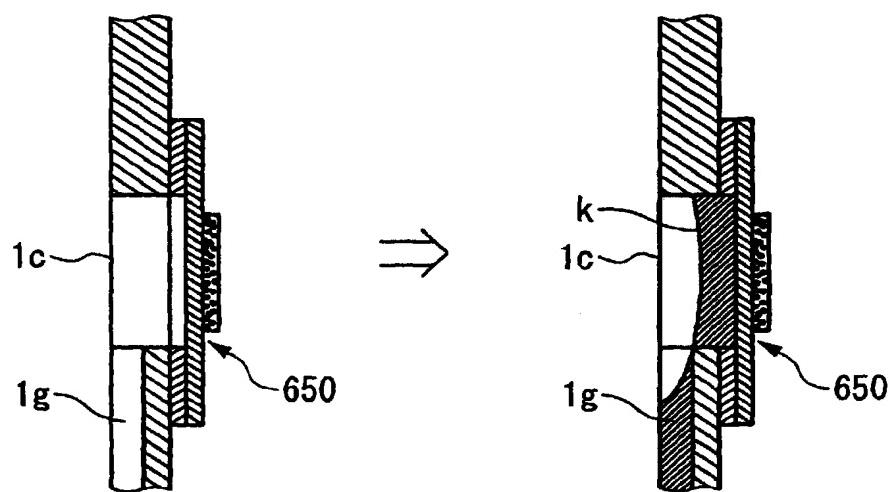


FIG. 29 (C)



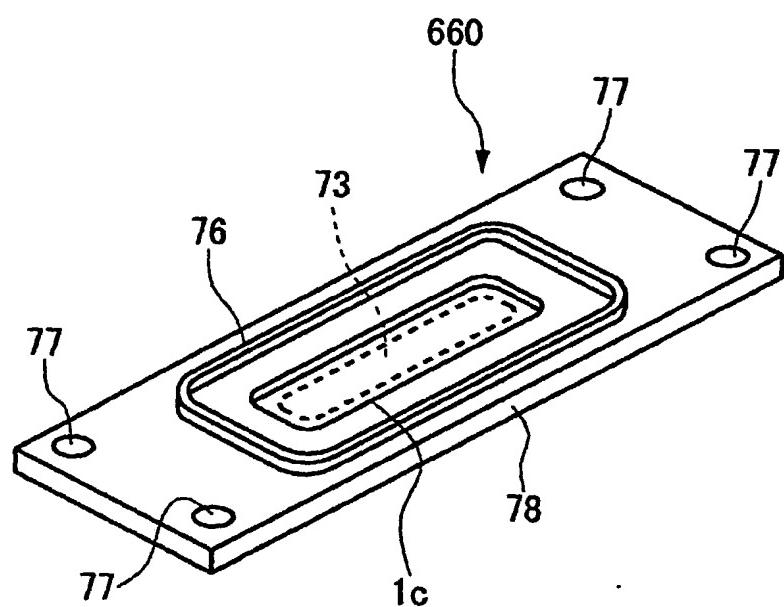


FIG. 30

670

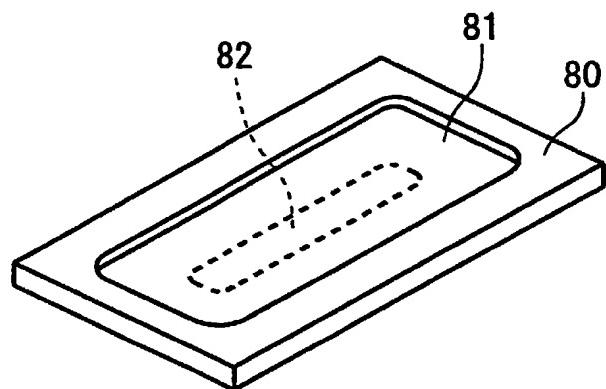


FIG. 31 (A)

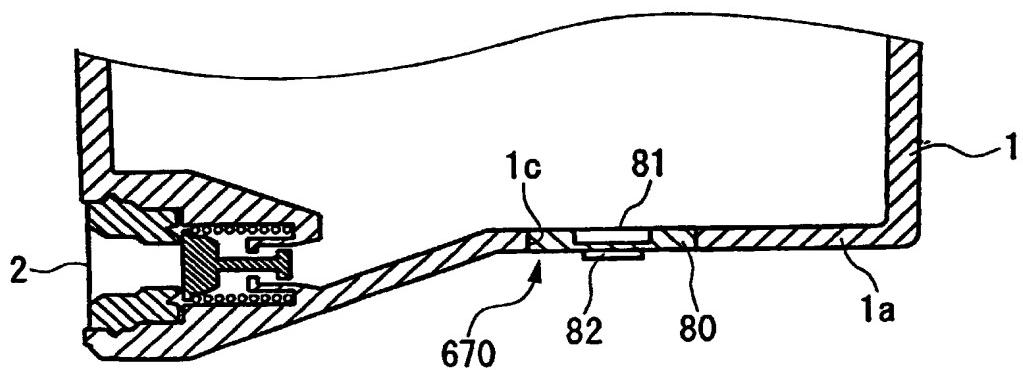
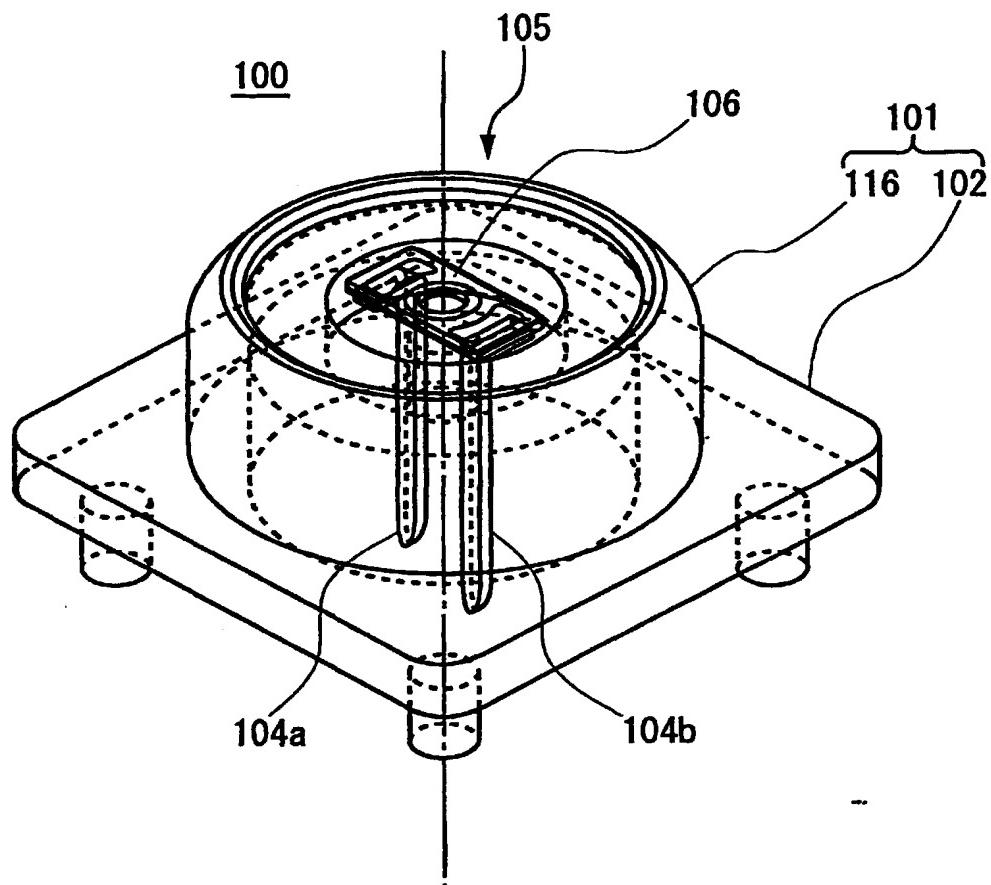


FIG. 31 (B)



F/ G . 23

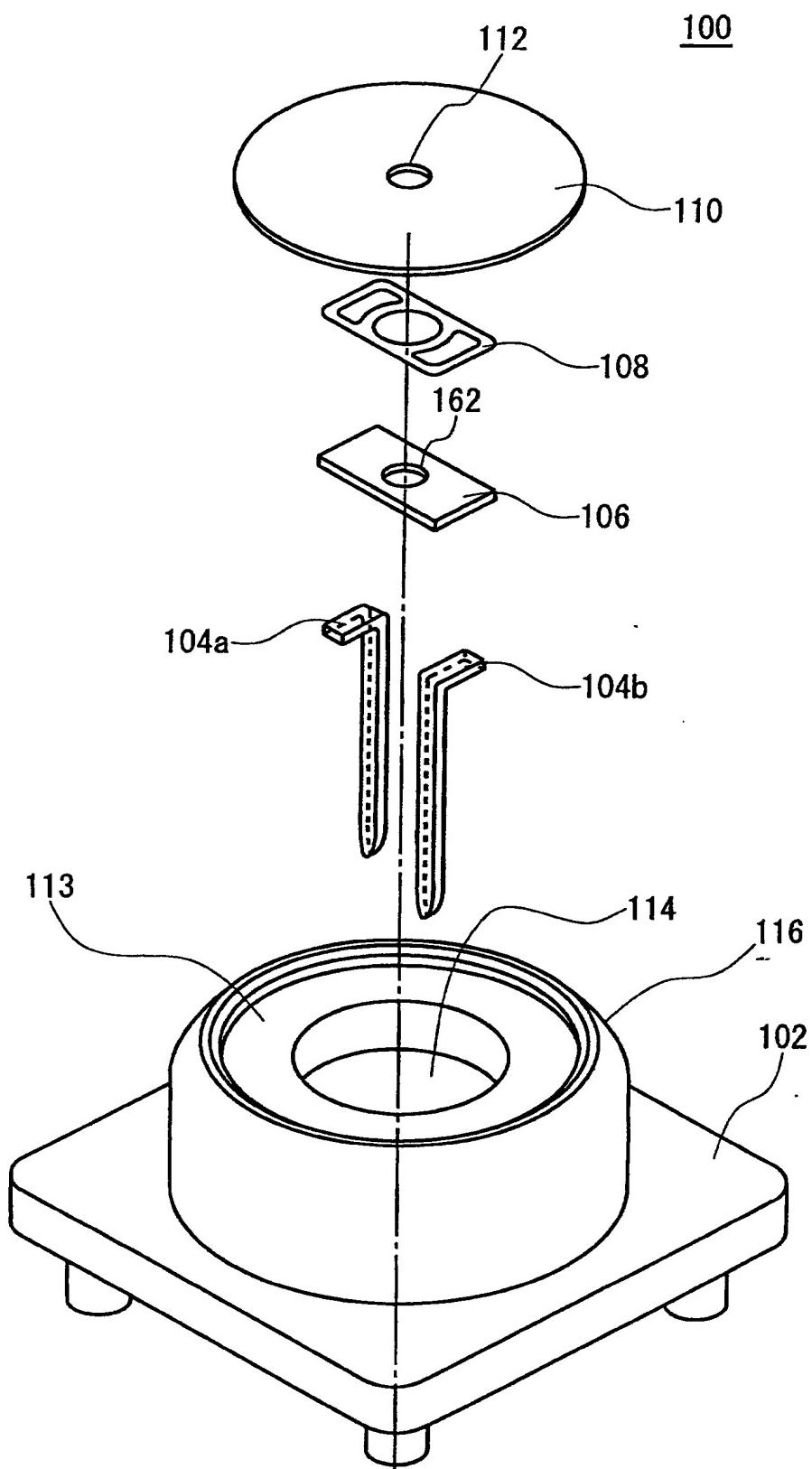
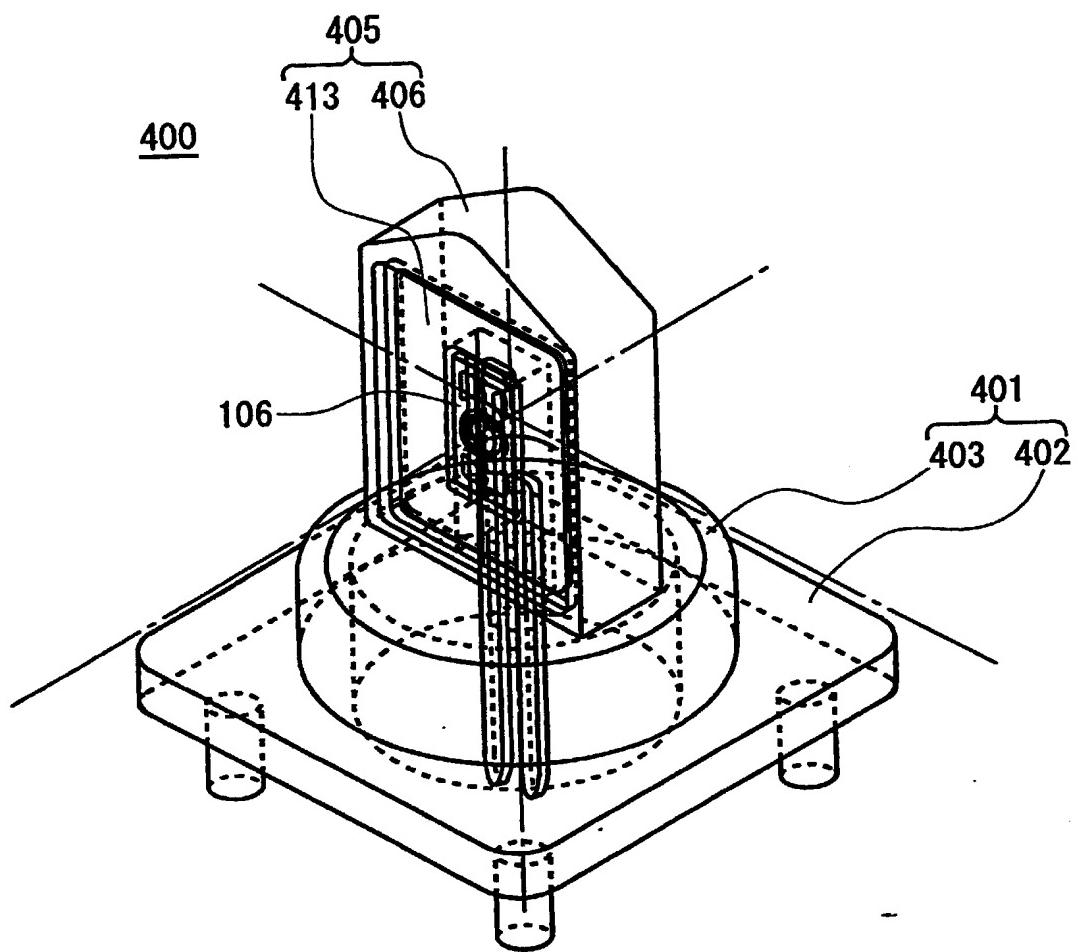
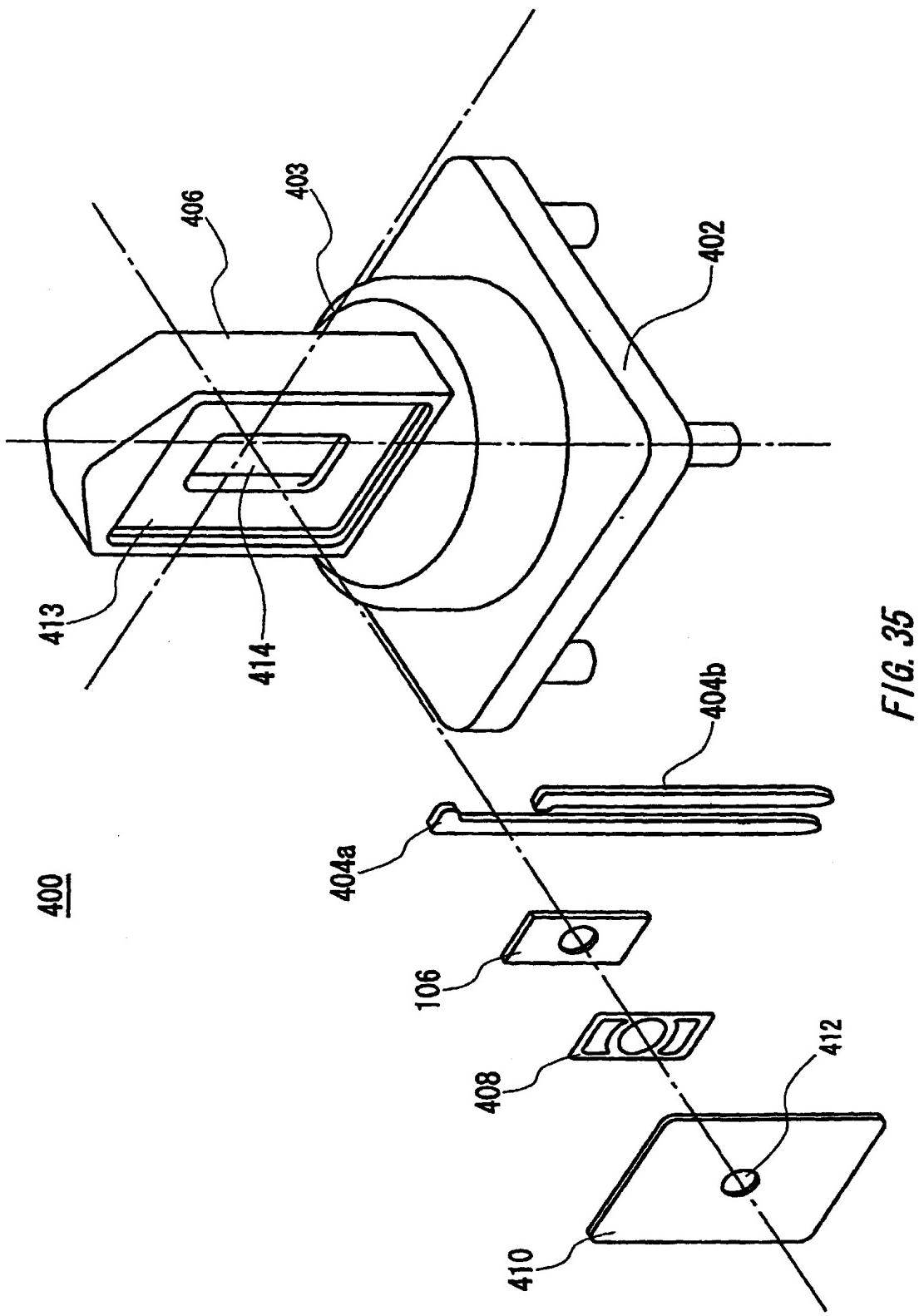


FIG 33



F 1.G3 4



500

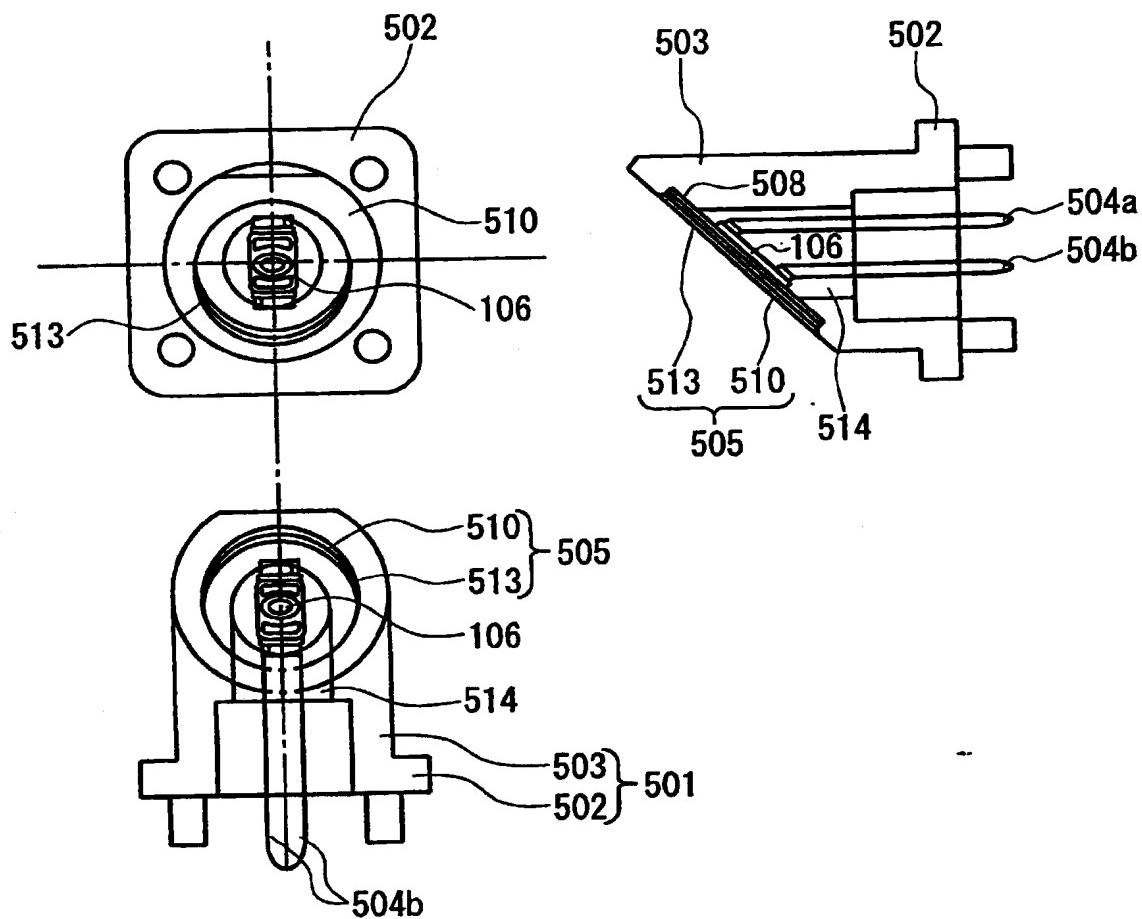


FIG. 36

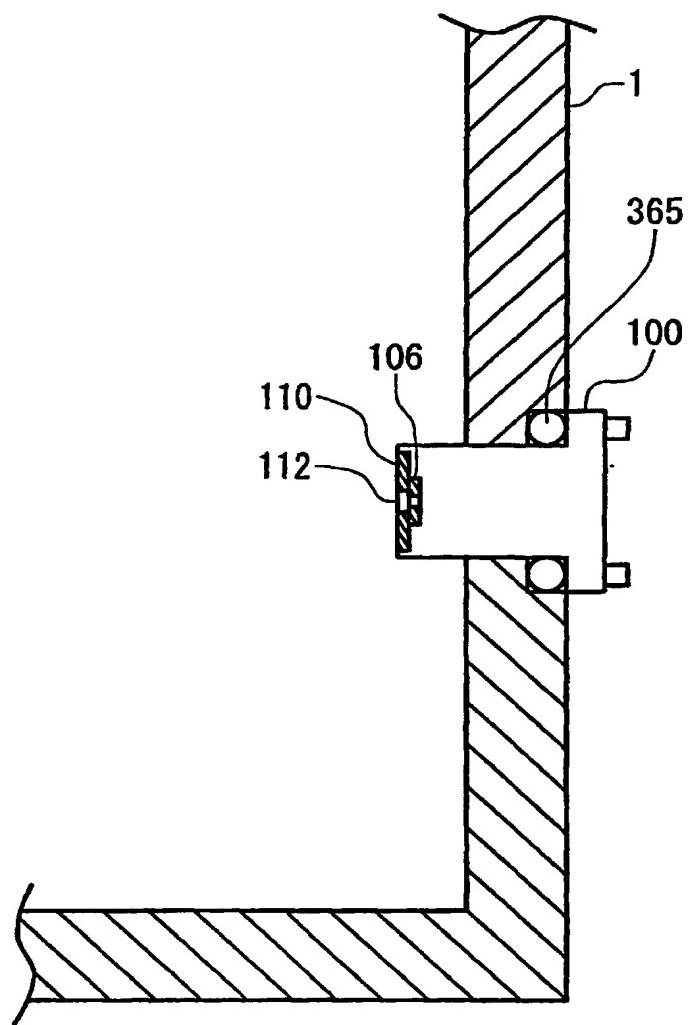


FIG. 37

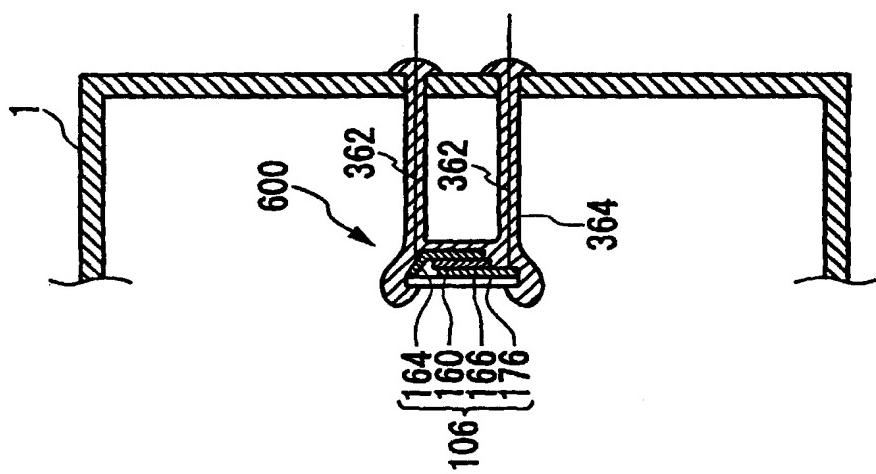


FIG. 38 (C)

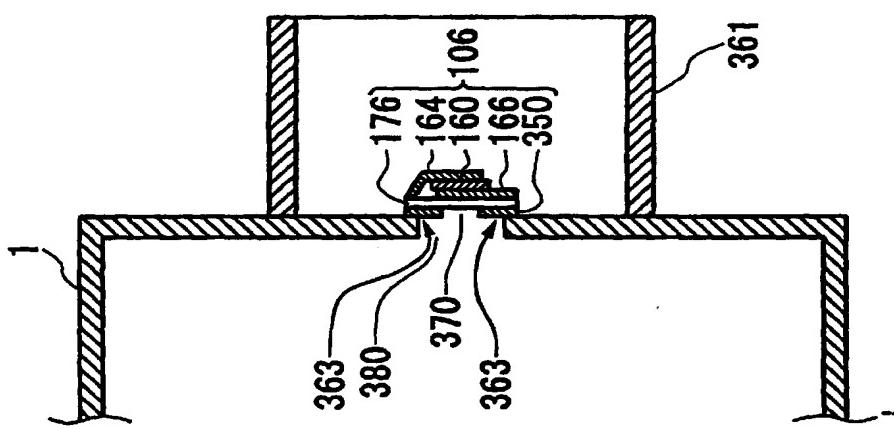


FIG. 38 (B)

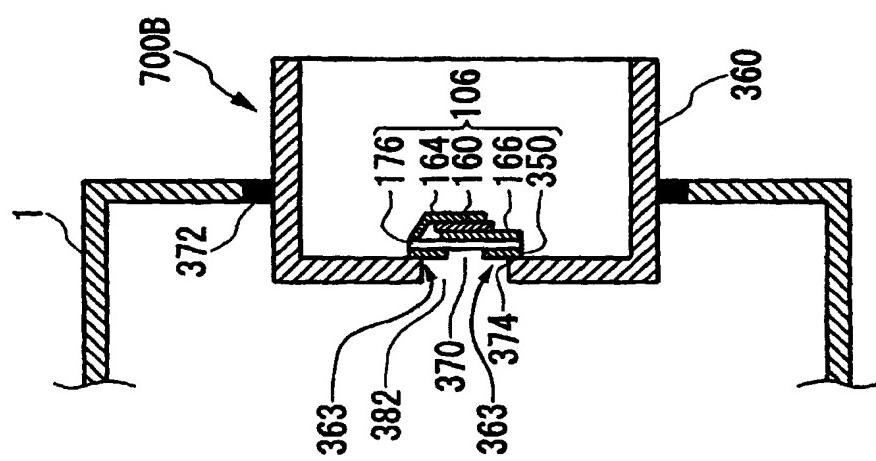
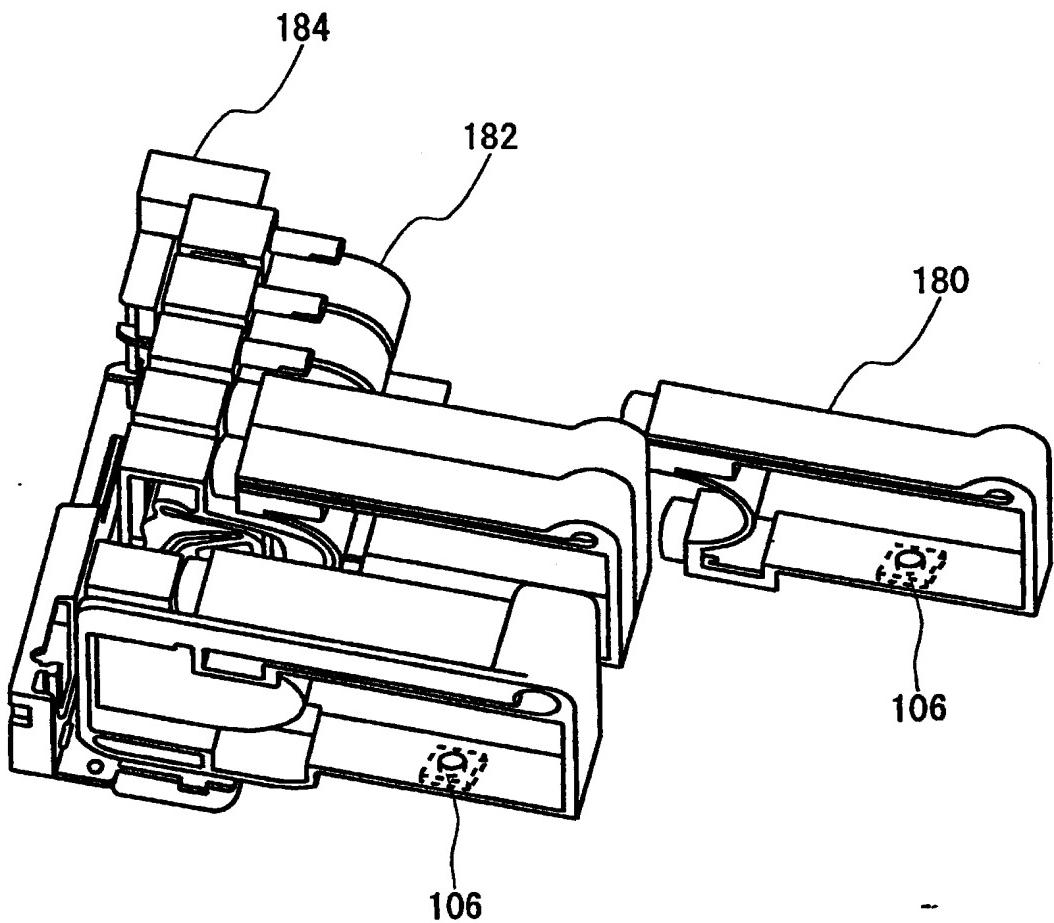


FIG. 38 (A)



F / G . 3 9

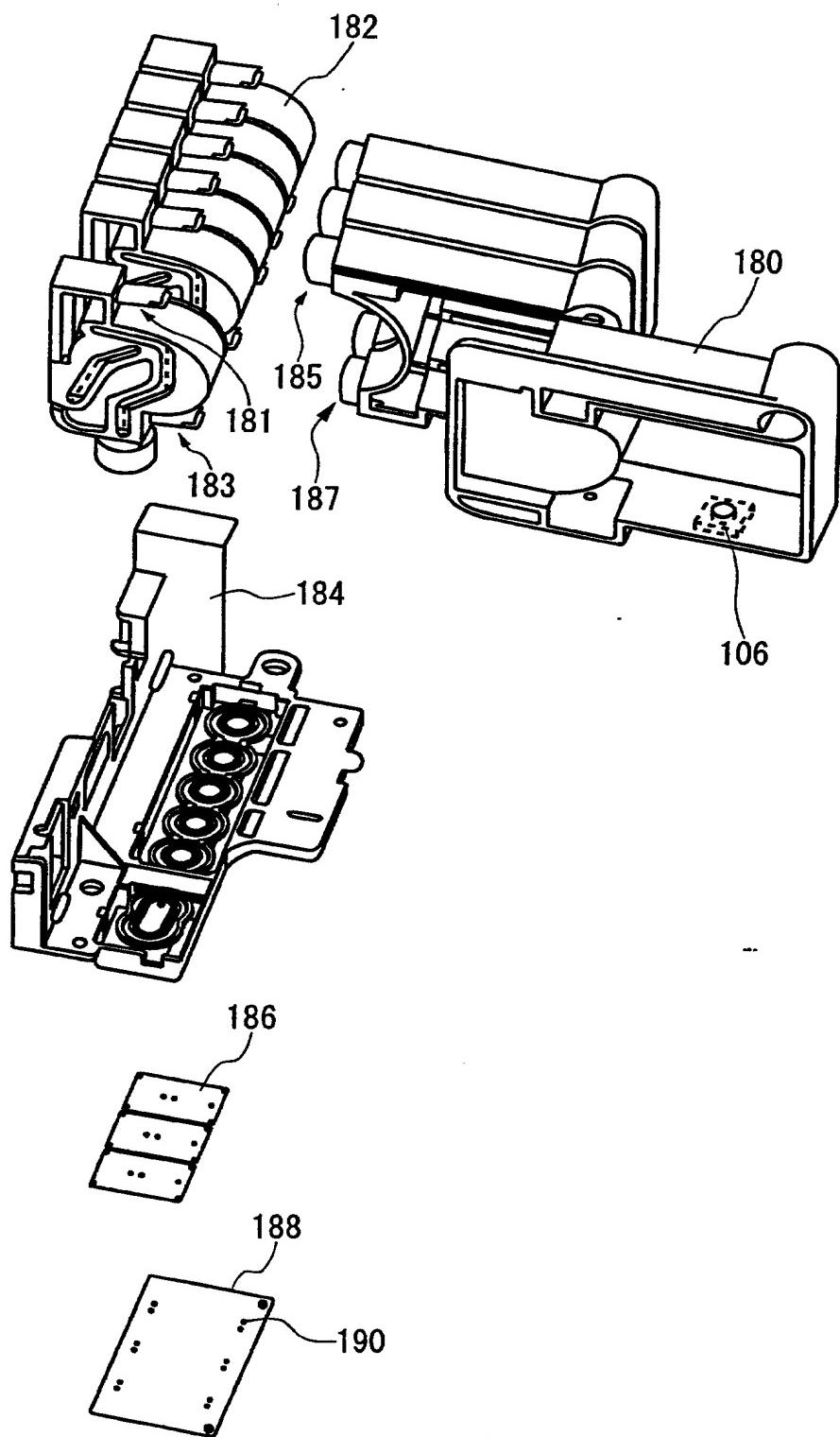


FIG 40

180A

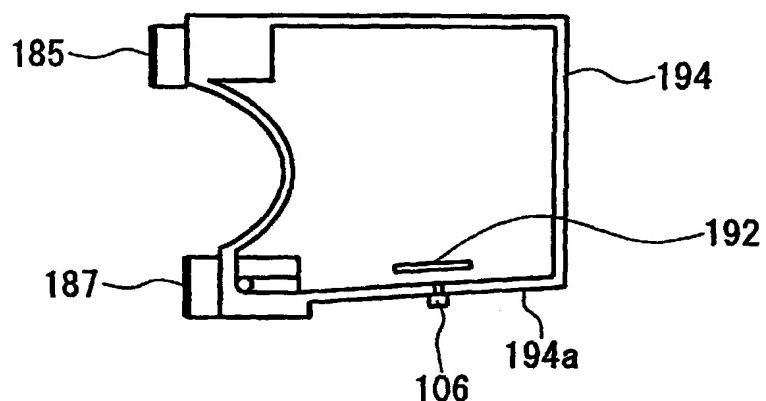


FIG. 41(A)

180B

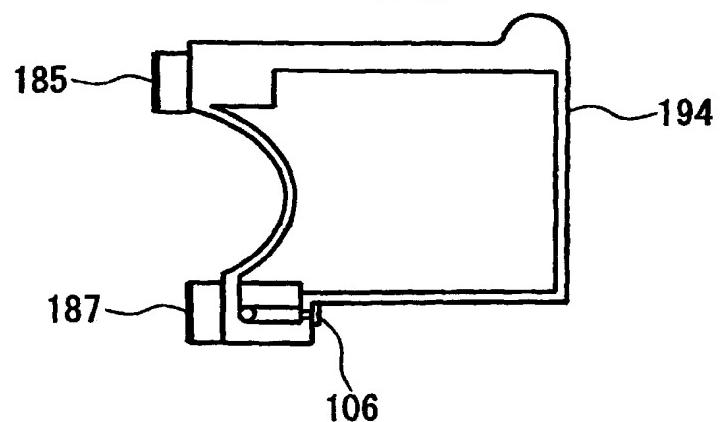


FIG. 41(B)

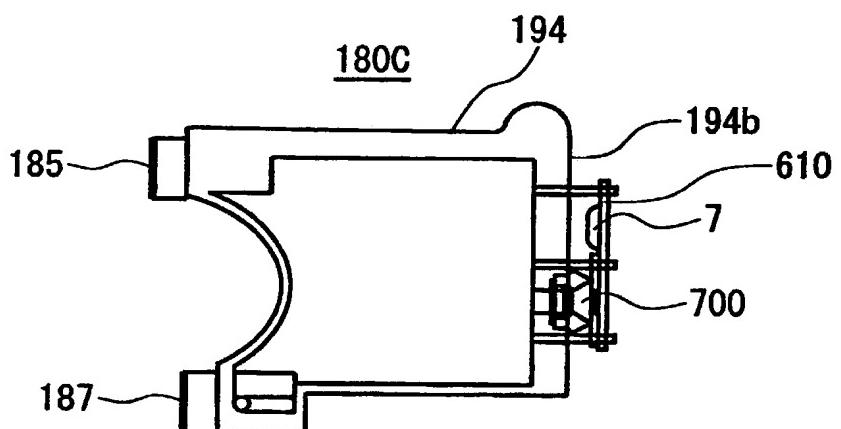


FIG. 42(A)

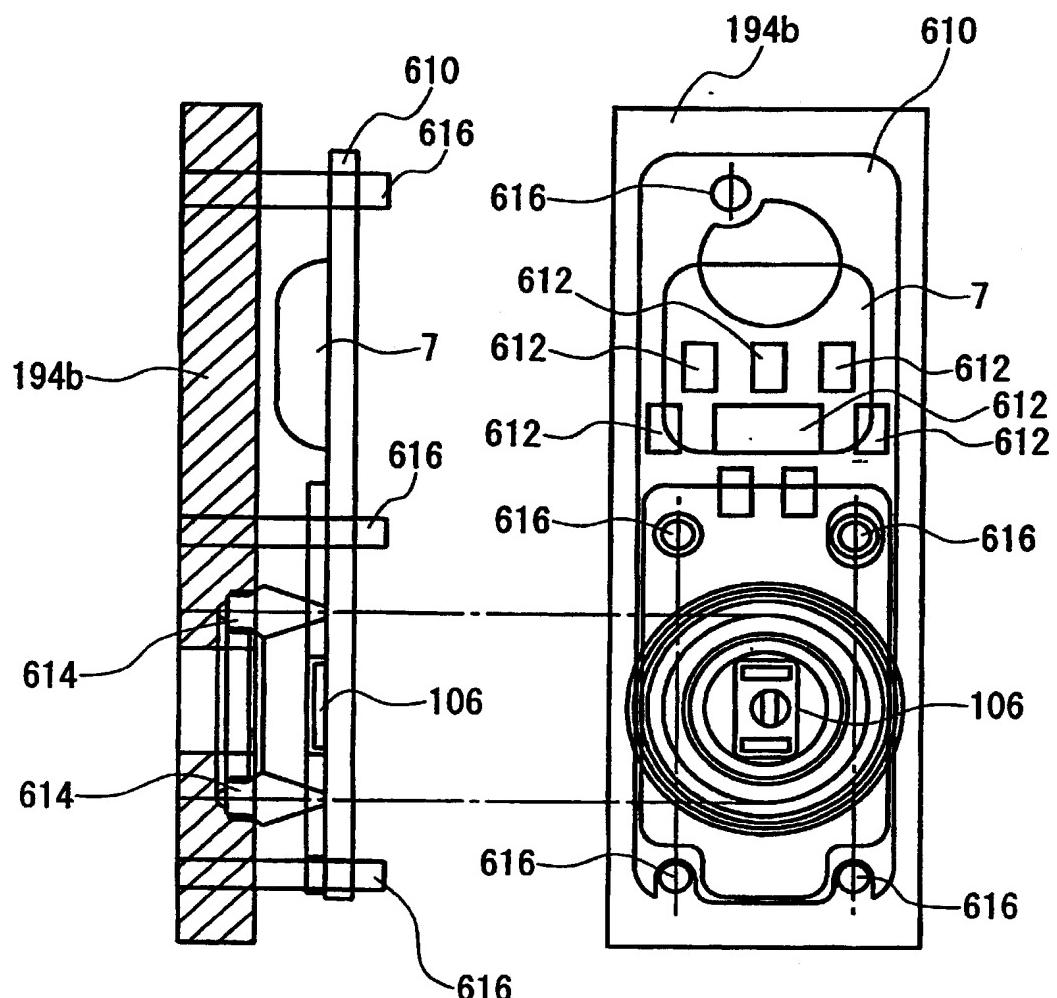


FIG. 42(B)

FIG. 42(C)

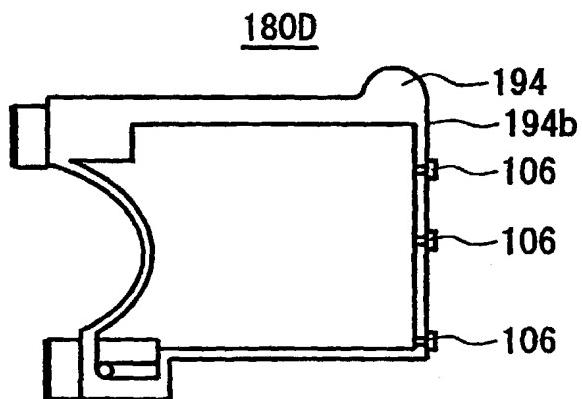


FIG. 43(A)

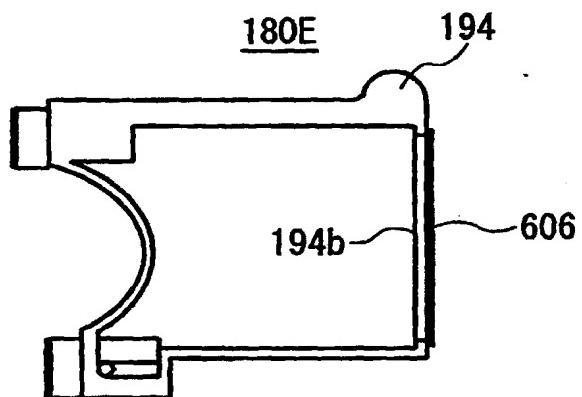


FIG. 43(B)

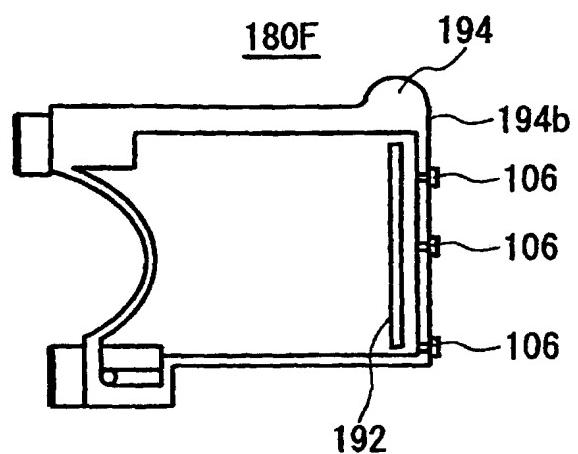


FIG. 43(C)

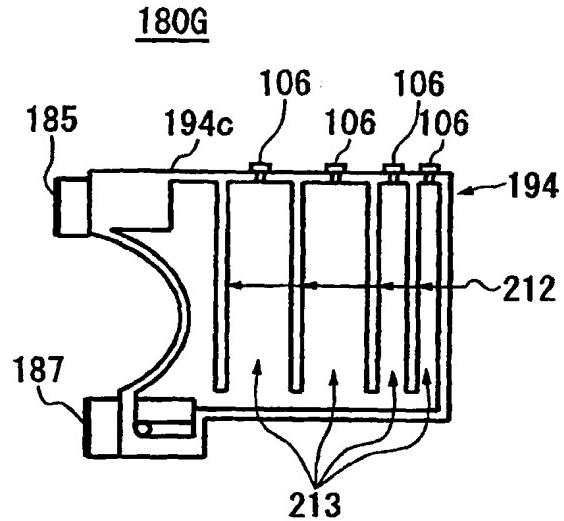


FIG. 44(A)

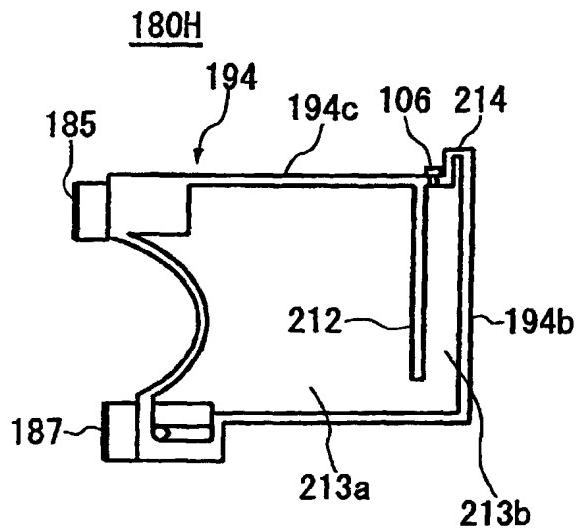


FIG. 44(B)

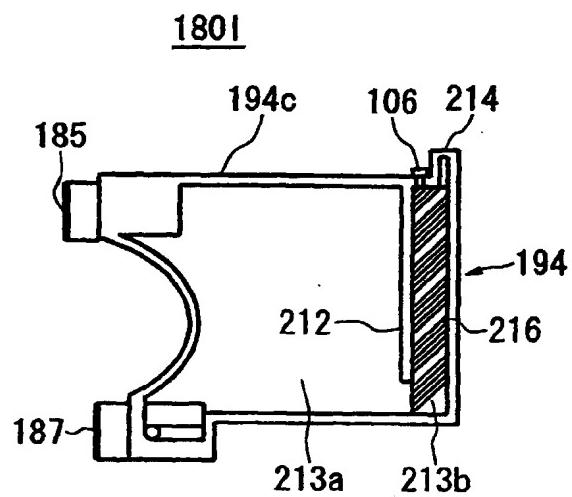


FIG. 44(C)

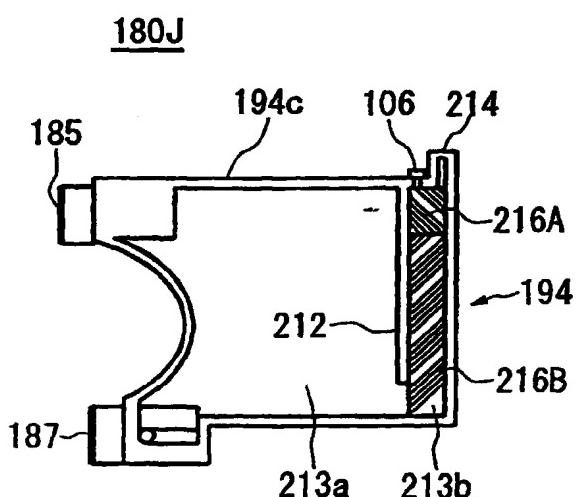


FIG. 44(D)

180K

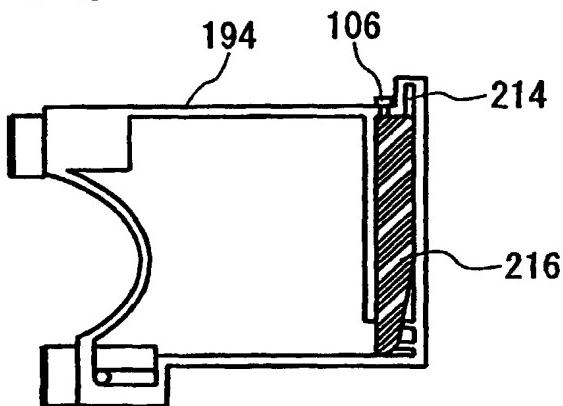


FIG. 45(A)

180L

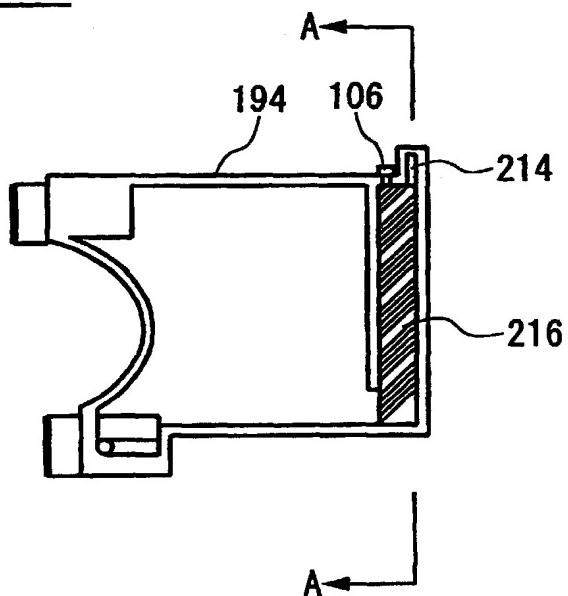


FIG. 45(B)

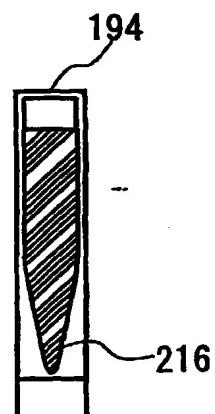


FIG. 45(C)

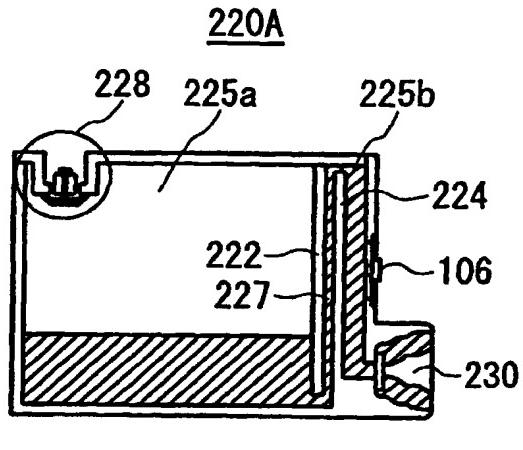


FIG. 46(A)

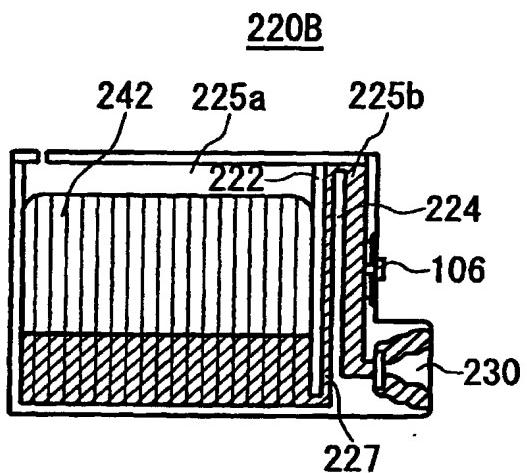


FIG. 46(B)

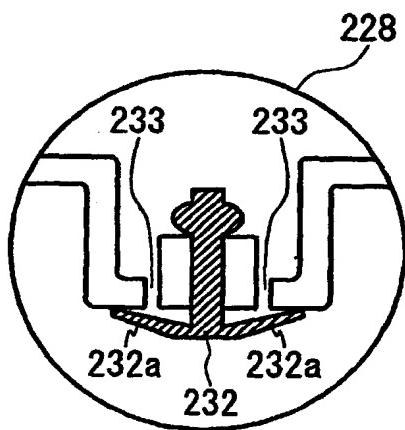


FIG. 46(C)

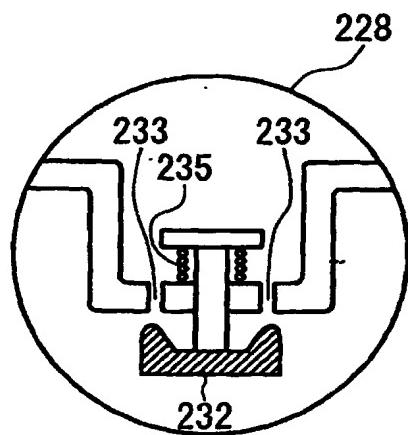
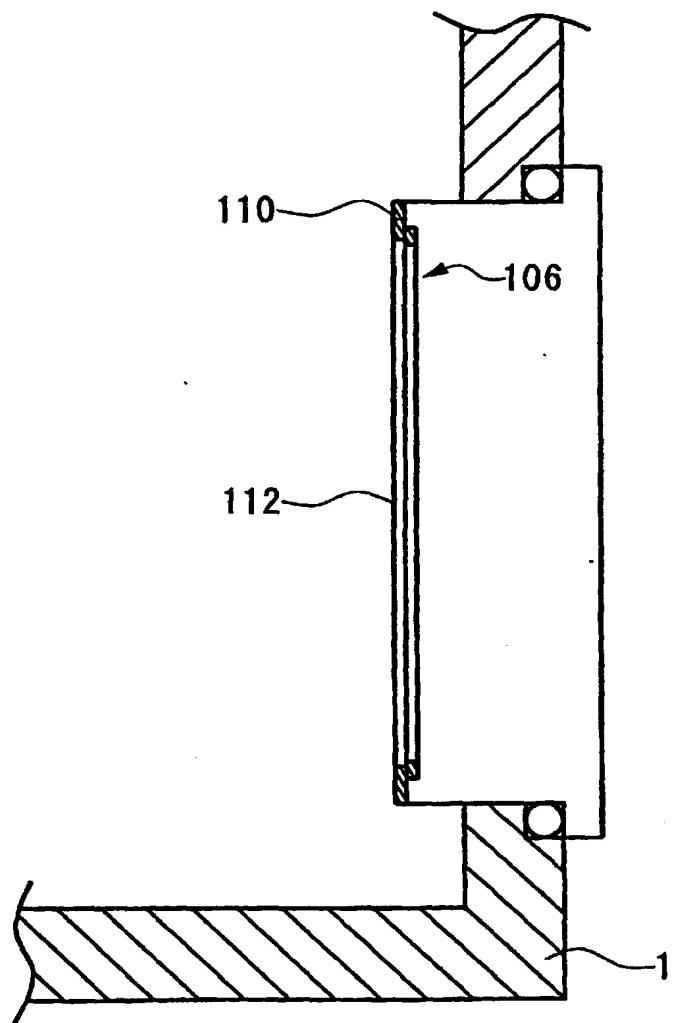


FIG. 46(D)



F 6. 47

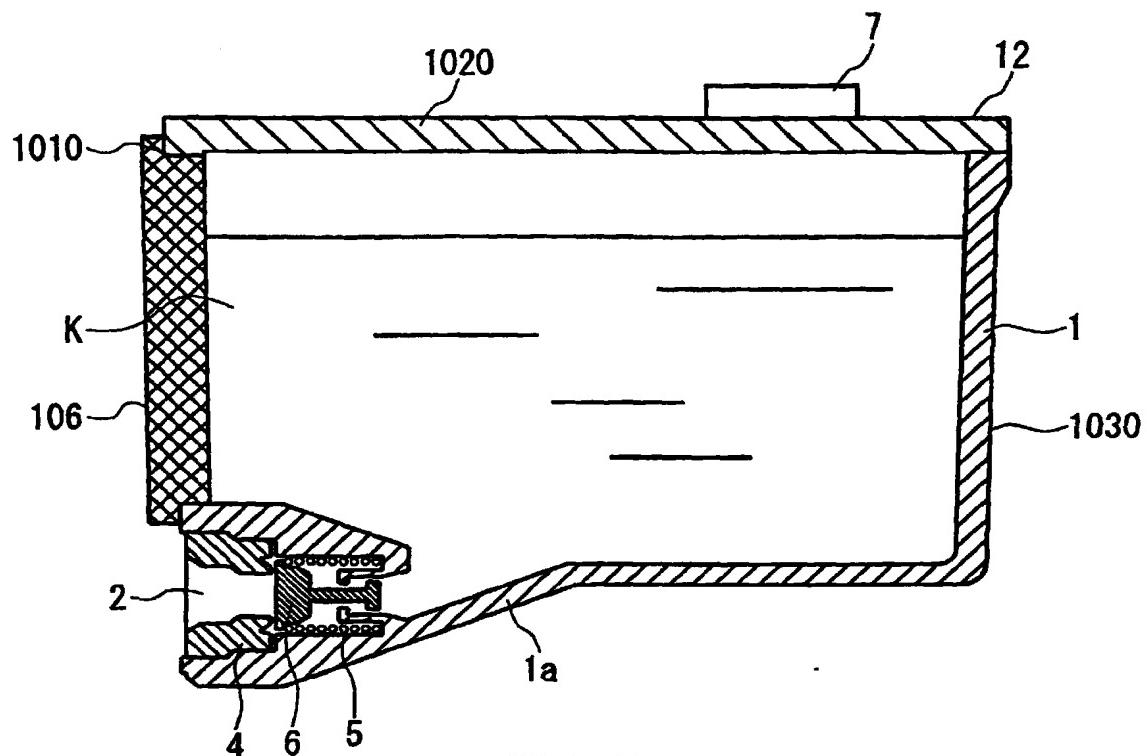


FIG. 48

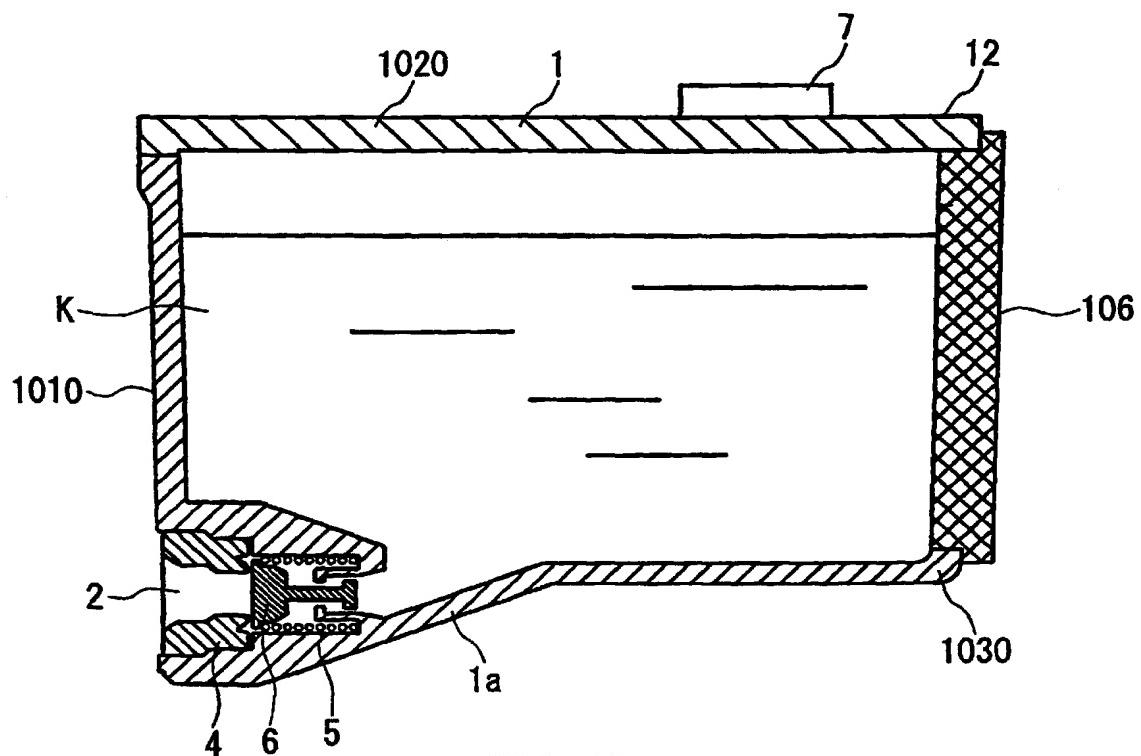


FIG. 49

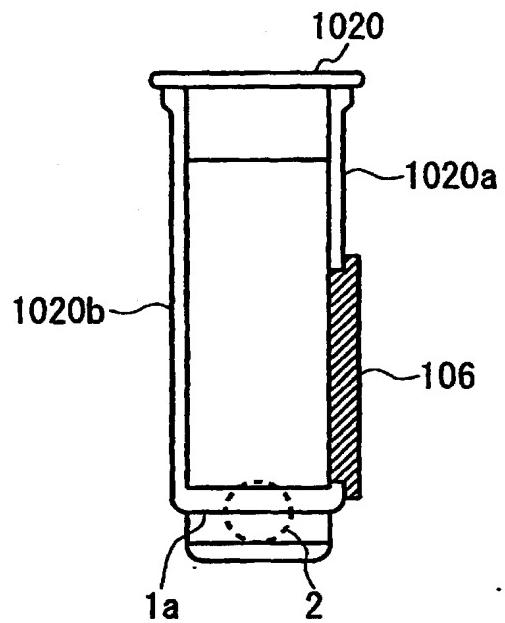


Fig. 05

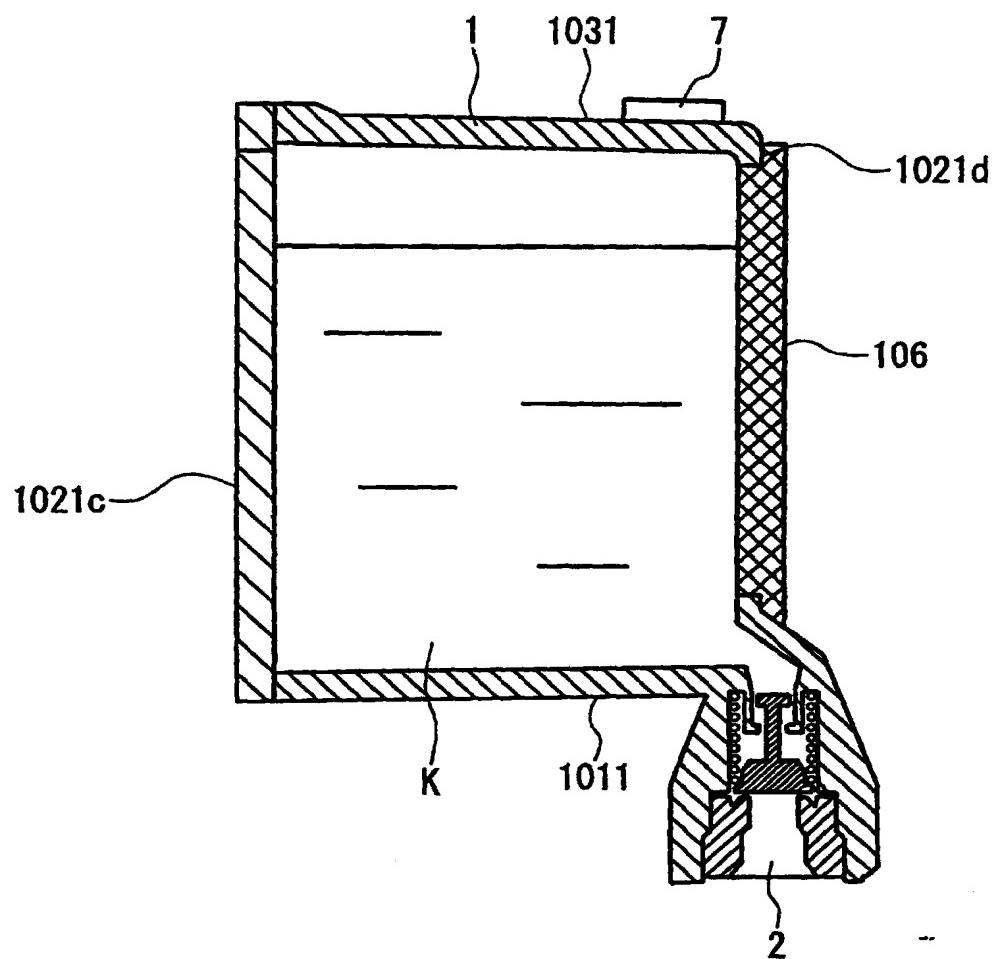


FIG. 5 1

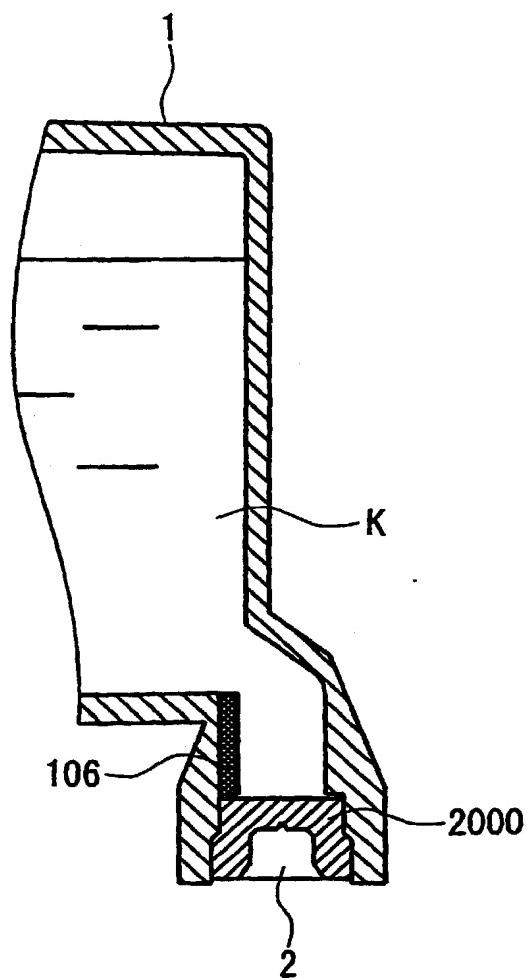
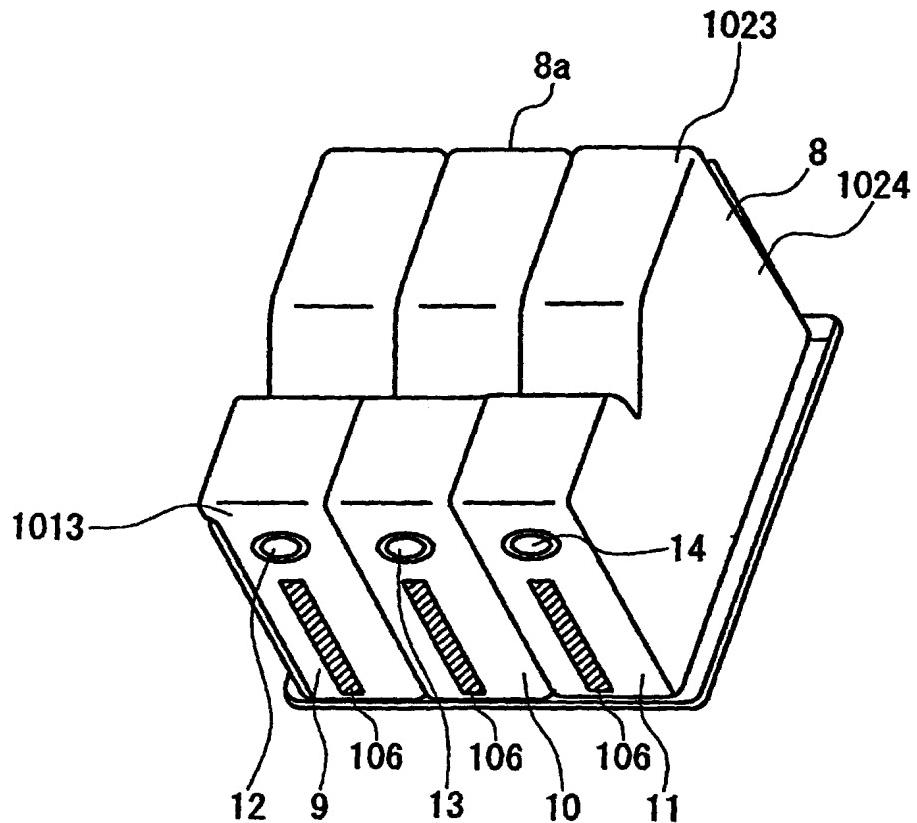


FIG. 52



F G . 35

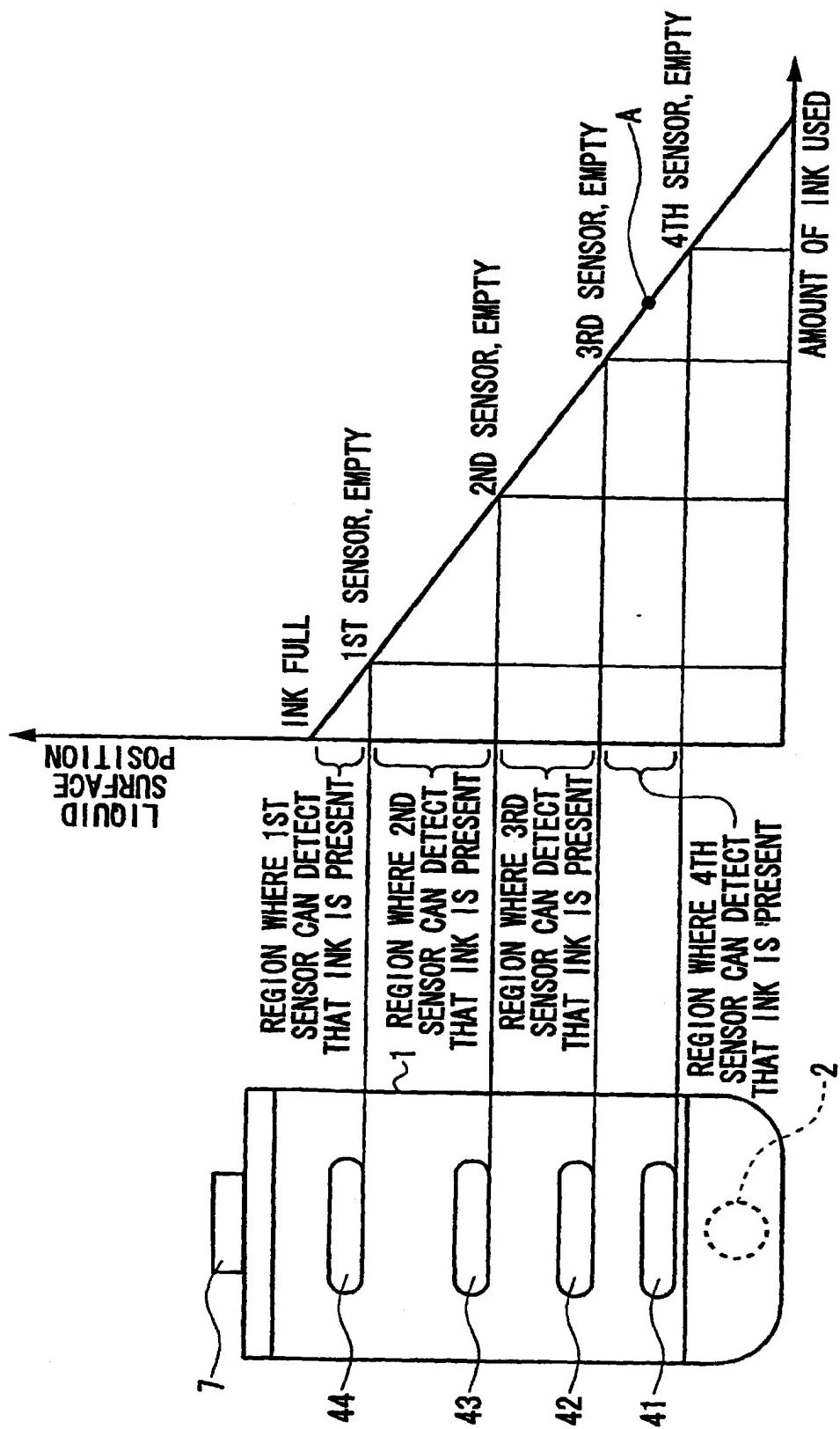


FIG. 54

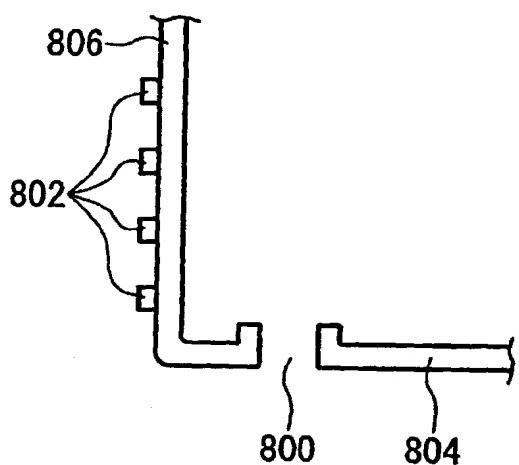


FIG. 55(A)

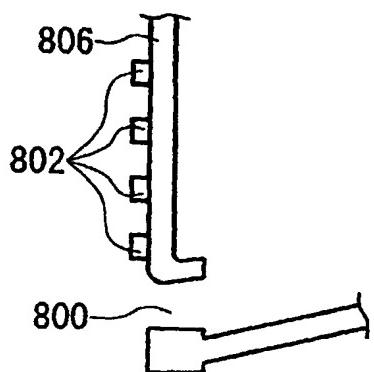


FIG. 55(B)

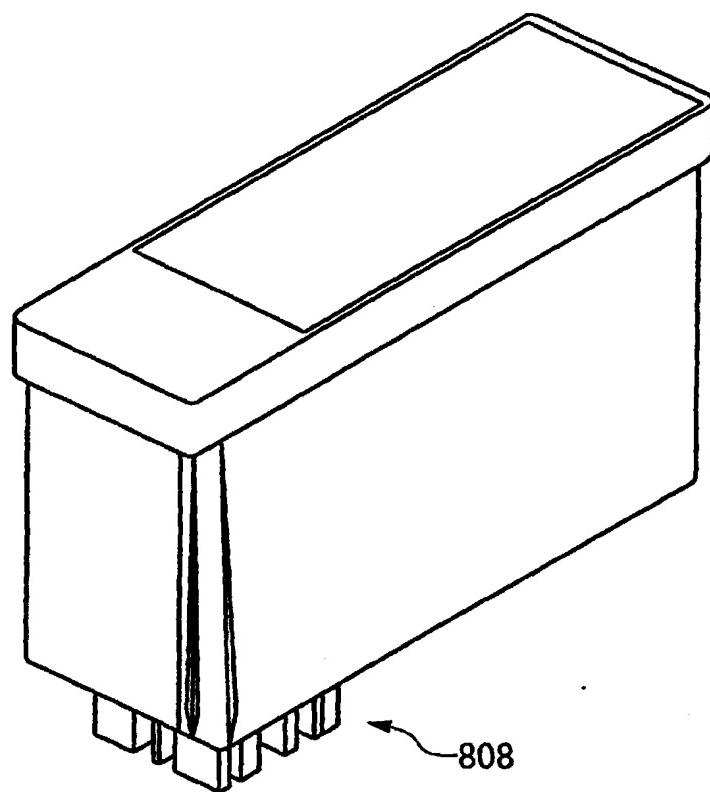


FIG. 56(A)

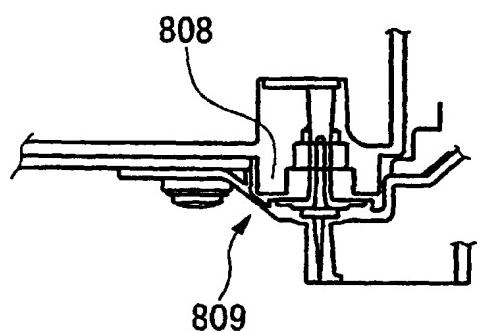


FIG. 56(B)

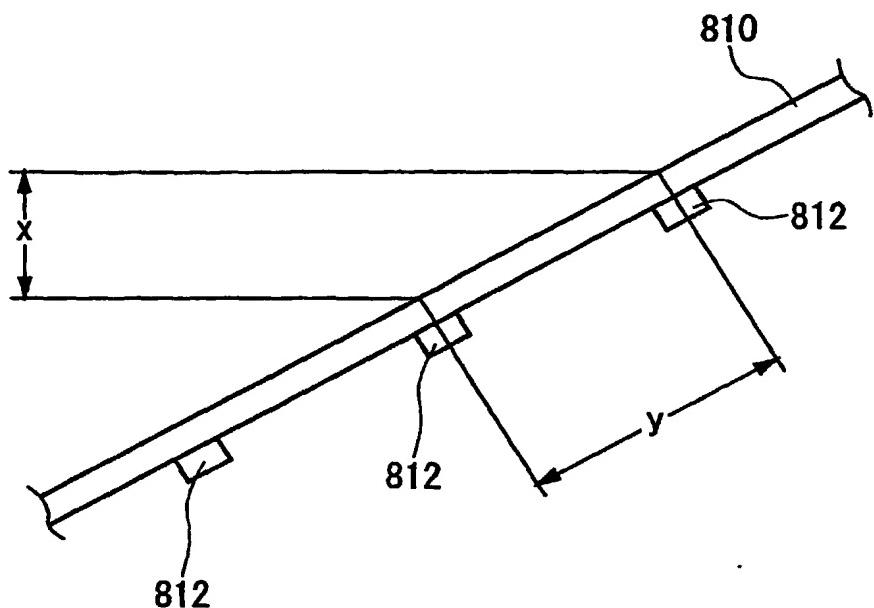
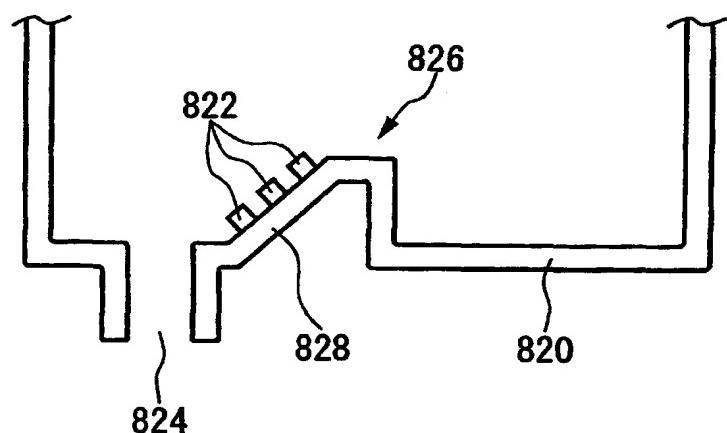
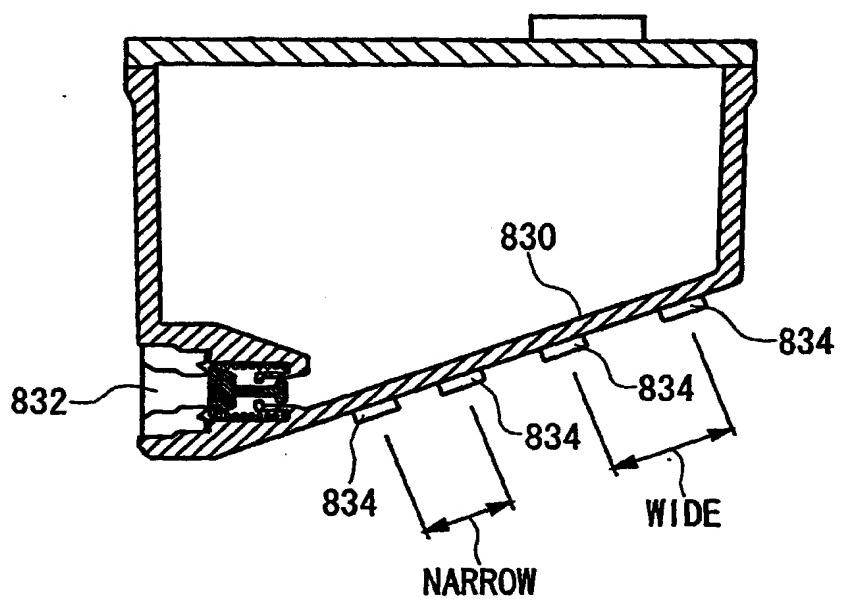


FIG. 57



F1 G5 8



F 1.G95

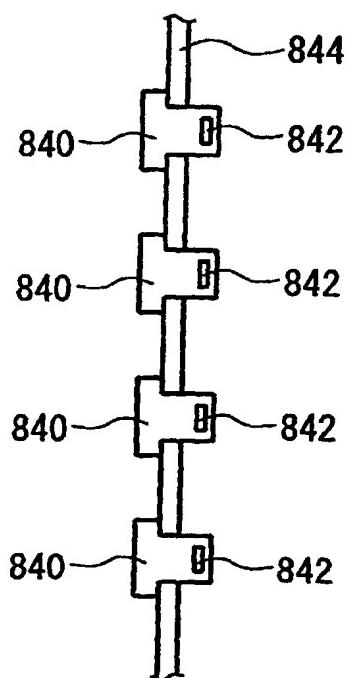


FIG. 60

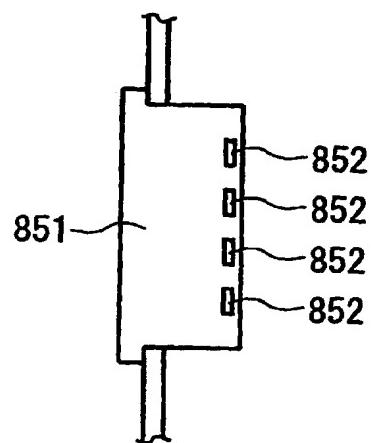


FIG. 61

FIG. 62 (A)

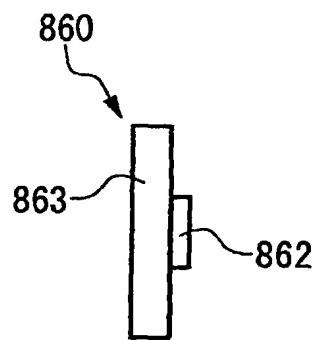


FIG. 62 (B)

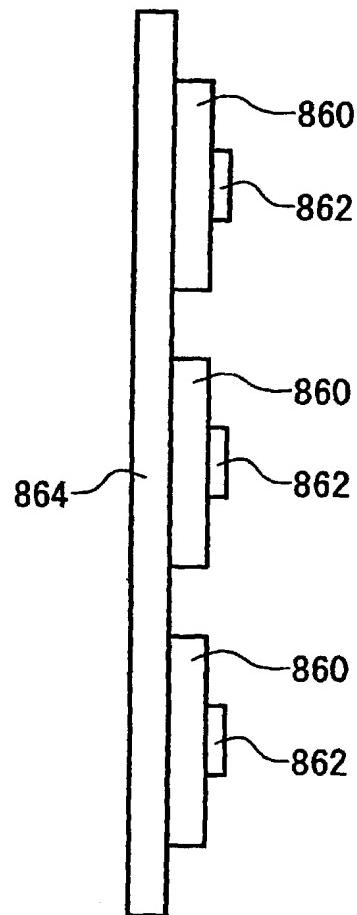
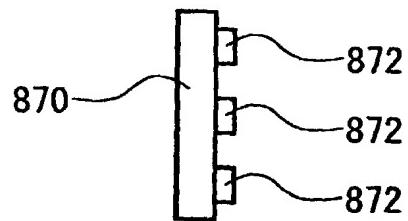


FIG. 62 (C)



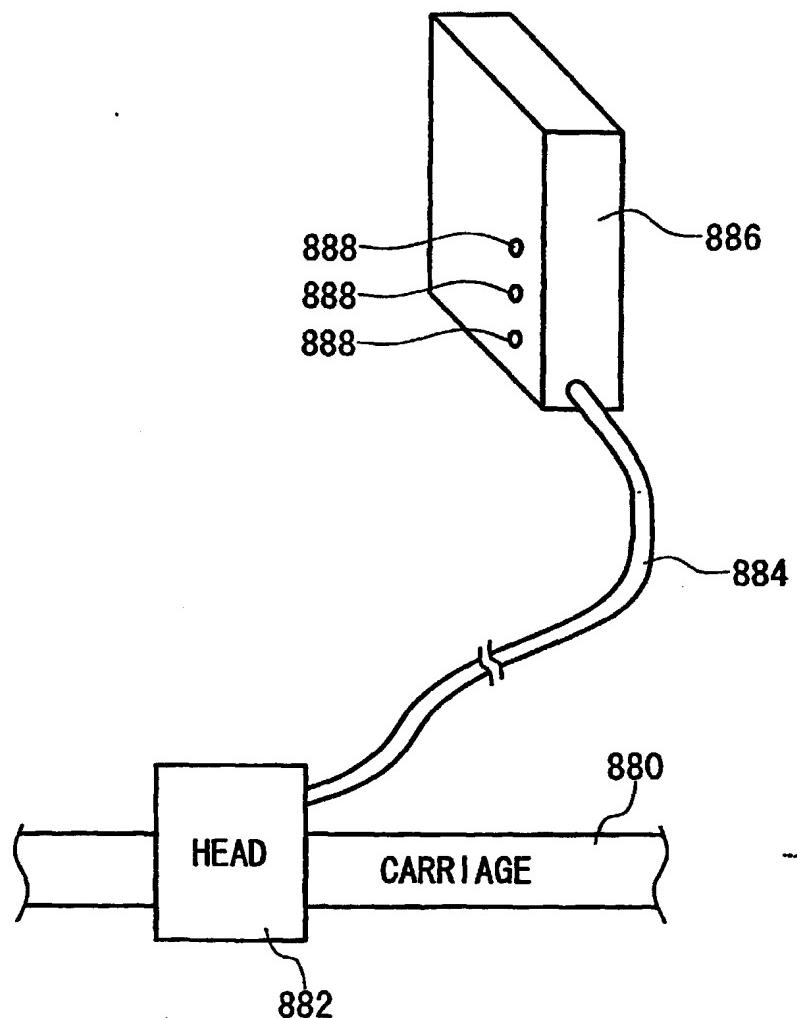
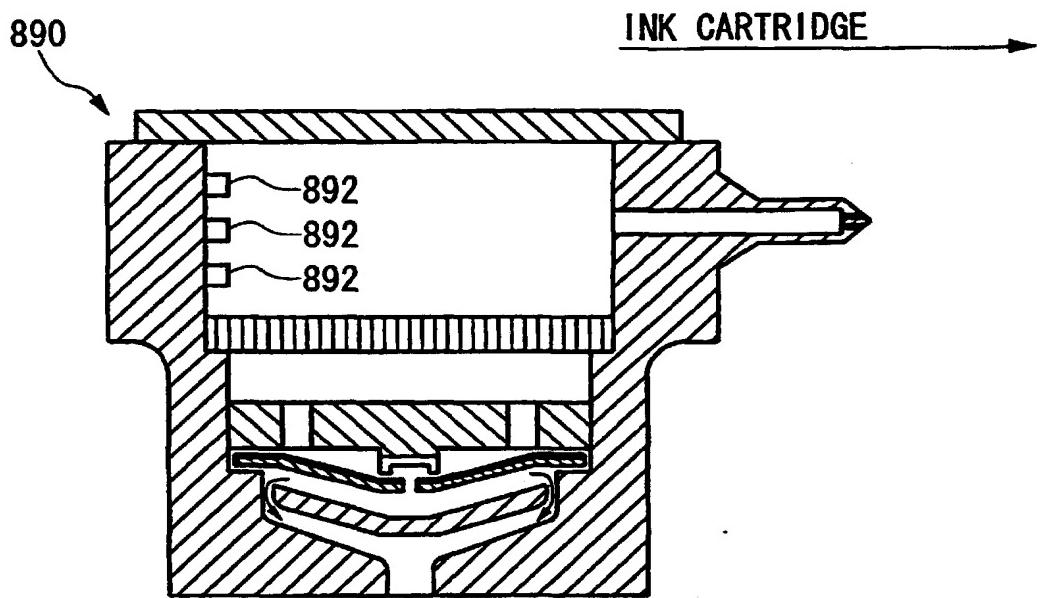


FIG. 63



F 16.4

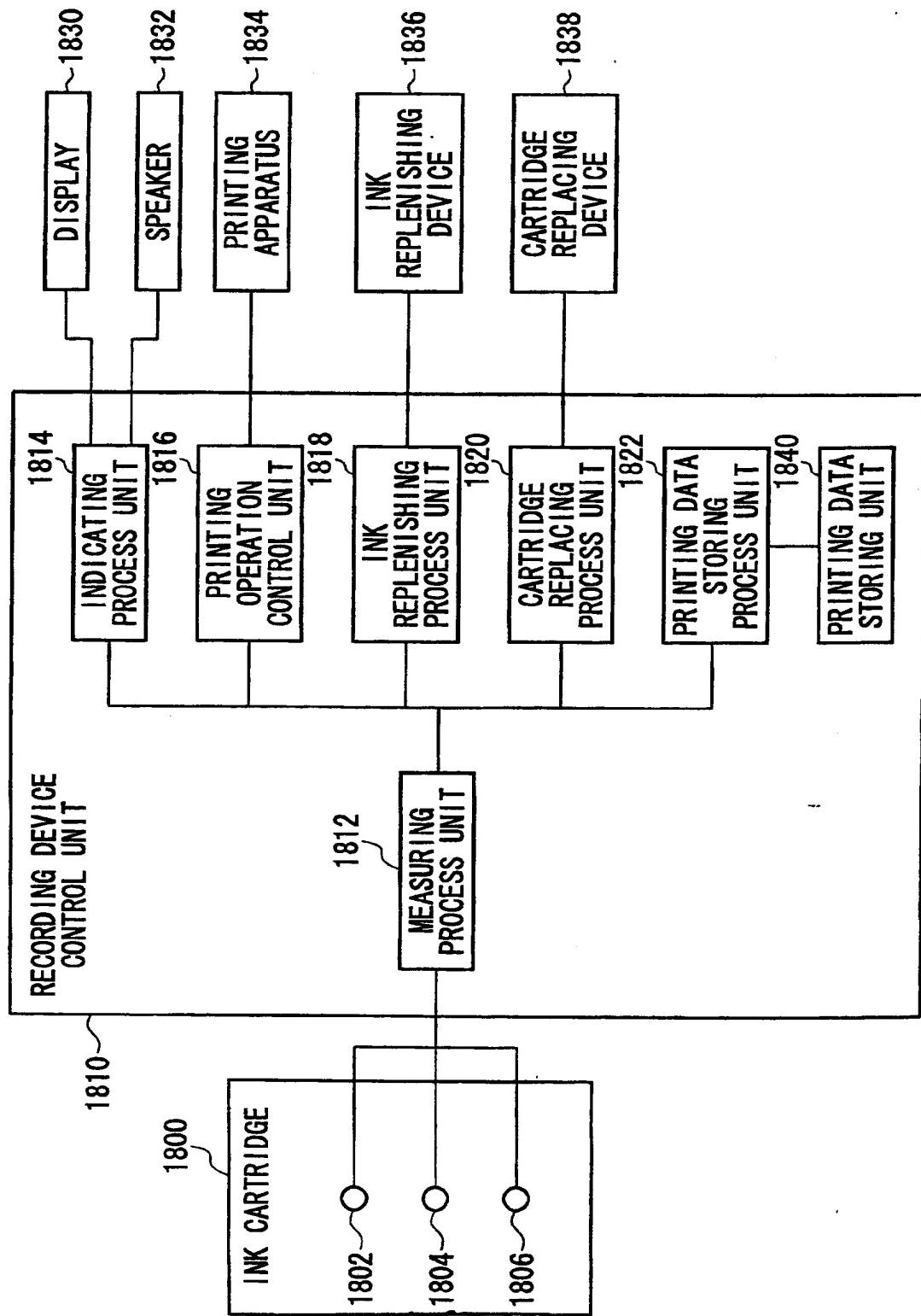


FIG. 65

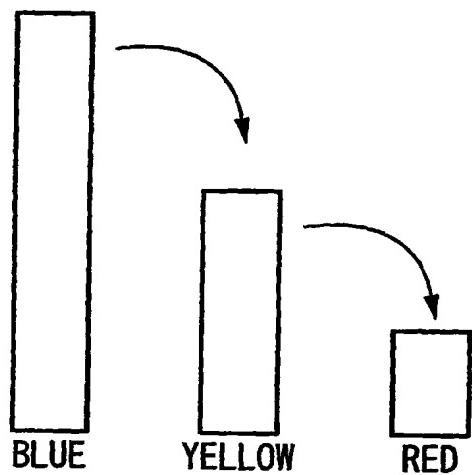


FIG. 66

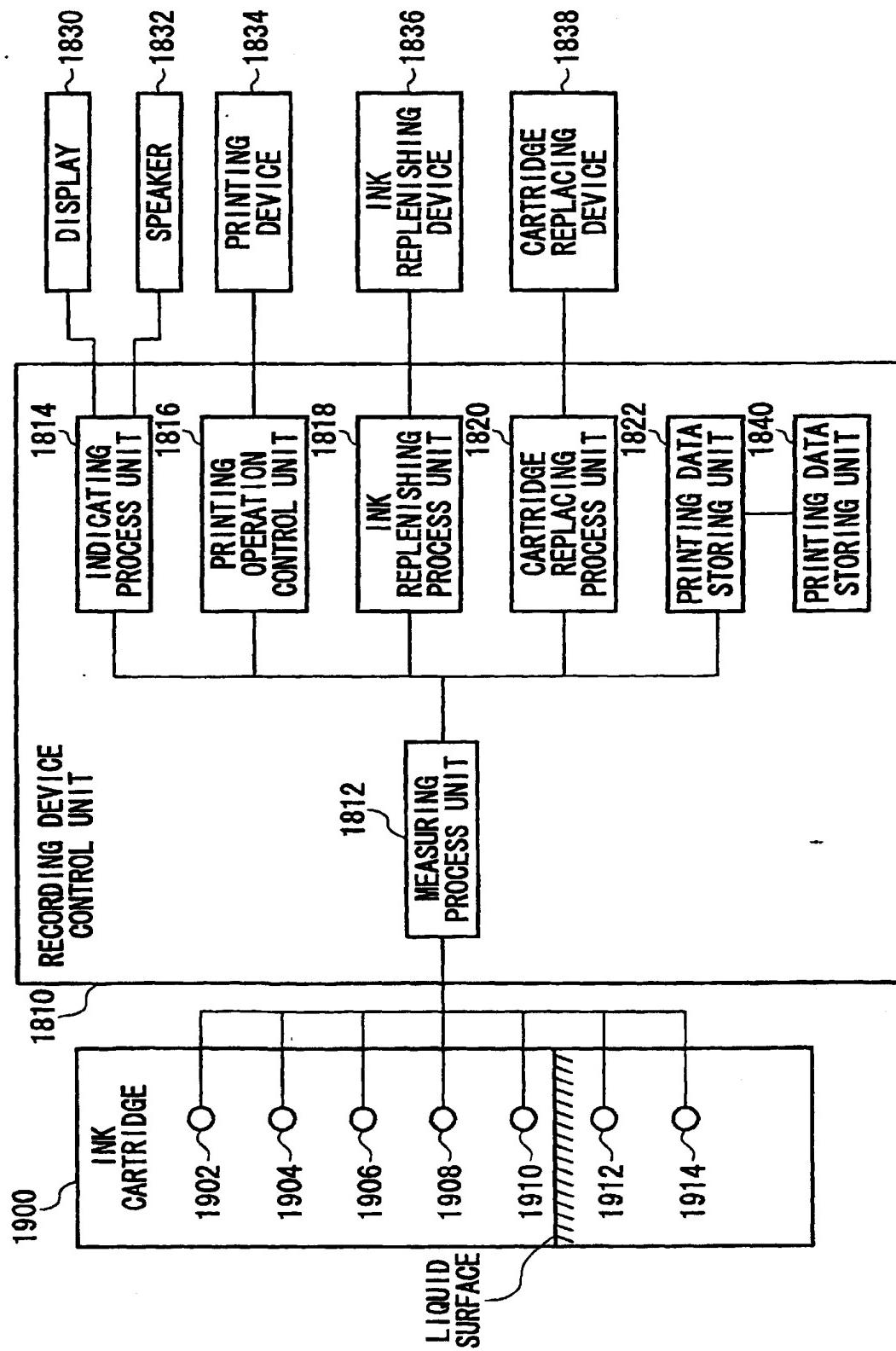


FIG. 67

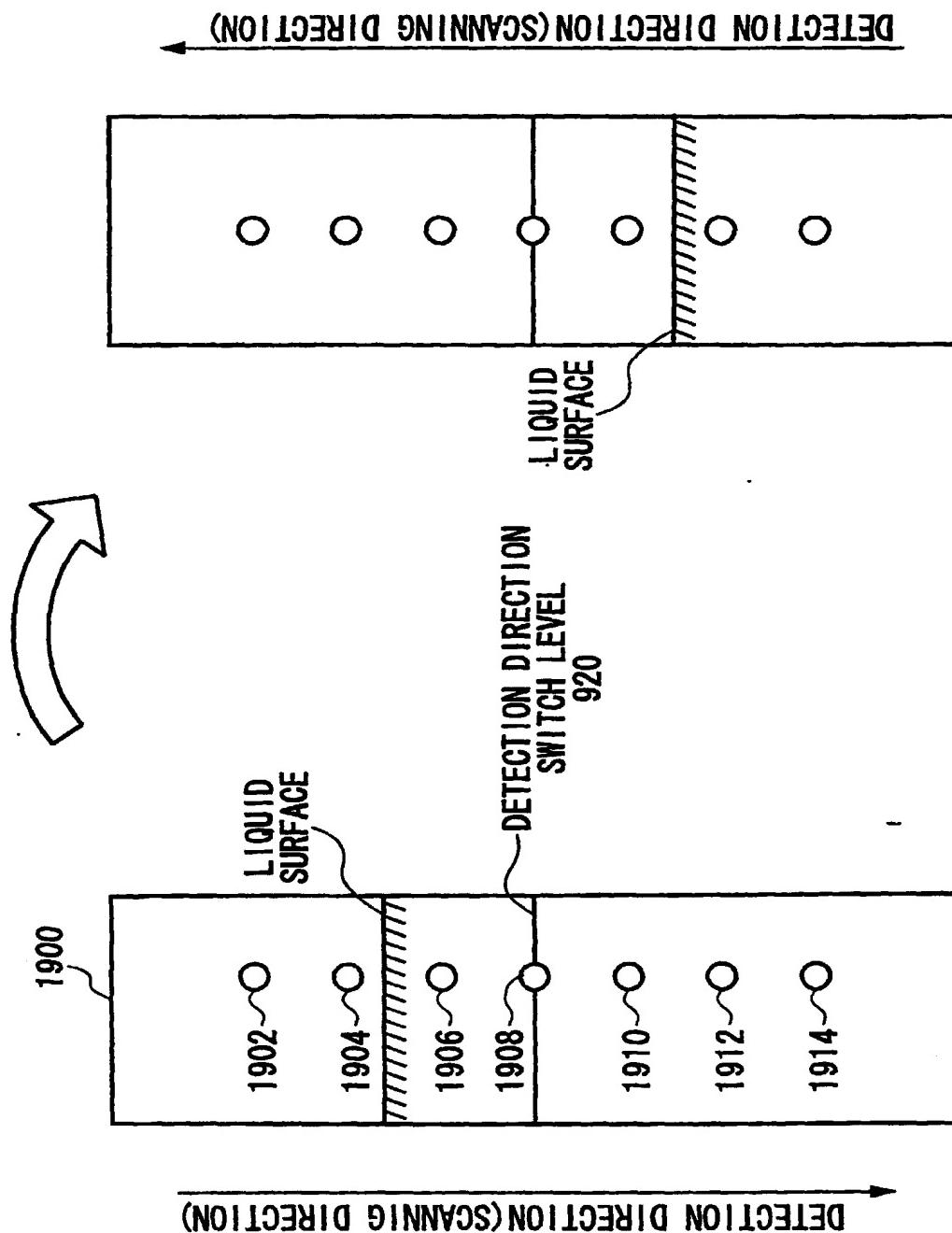
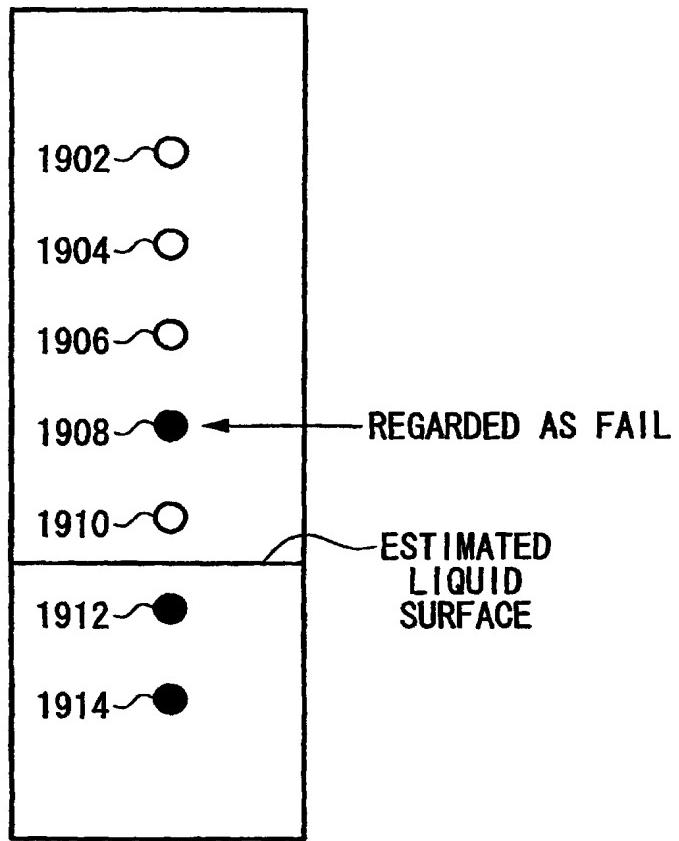


FIG. 68



- INK-EMPTY STATE
- INK-PRESENT STATE

FIG. 69

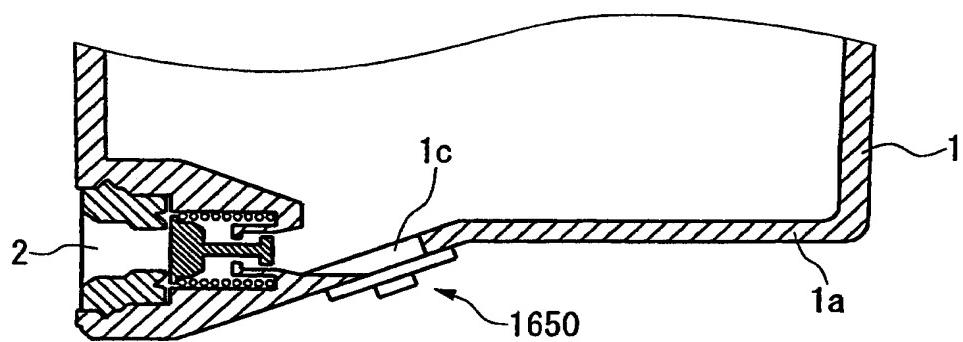


FIG. 70(A)

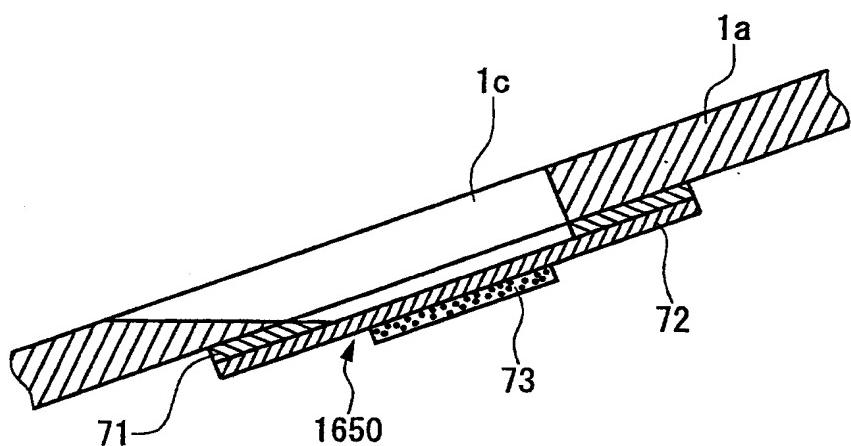


FIG. 70(B)

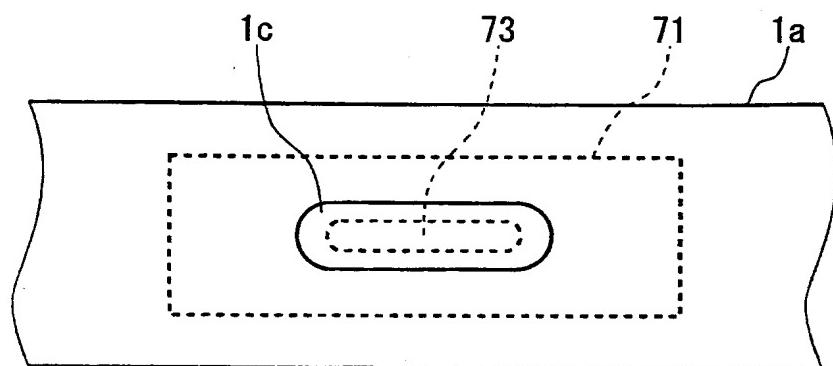
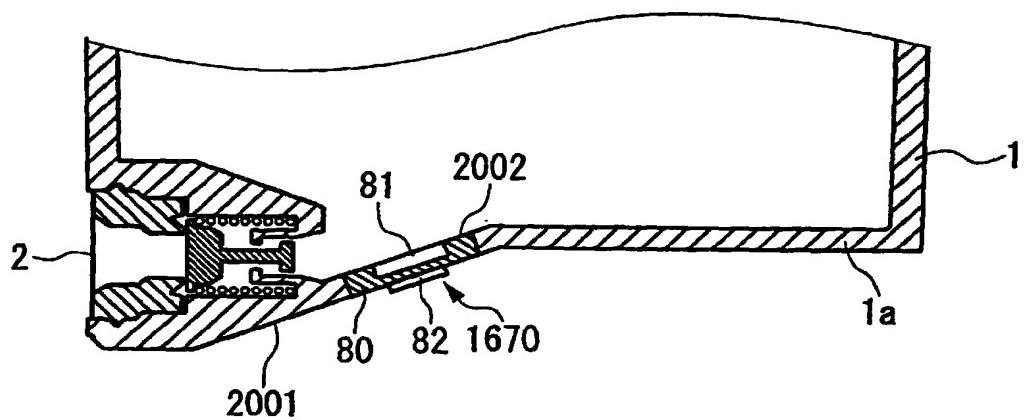


FIG. 70(C)



F / G . 7 1

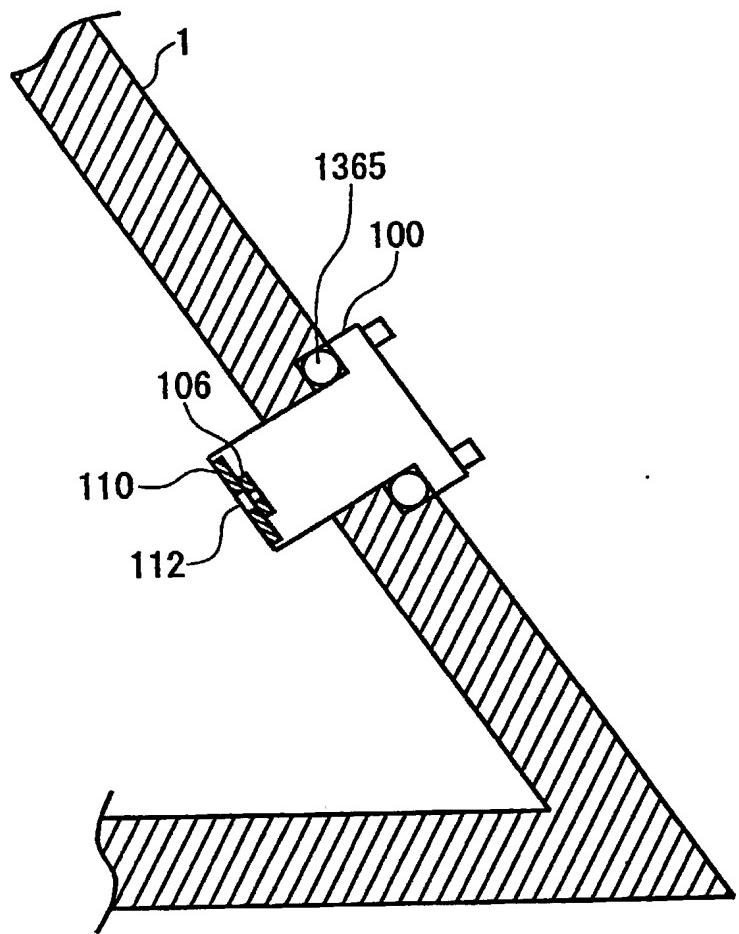


FIG. 72

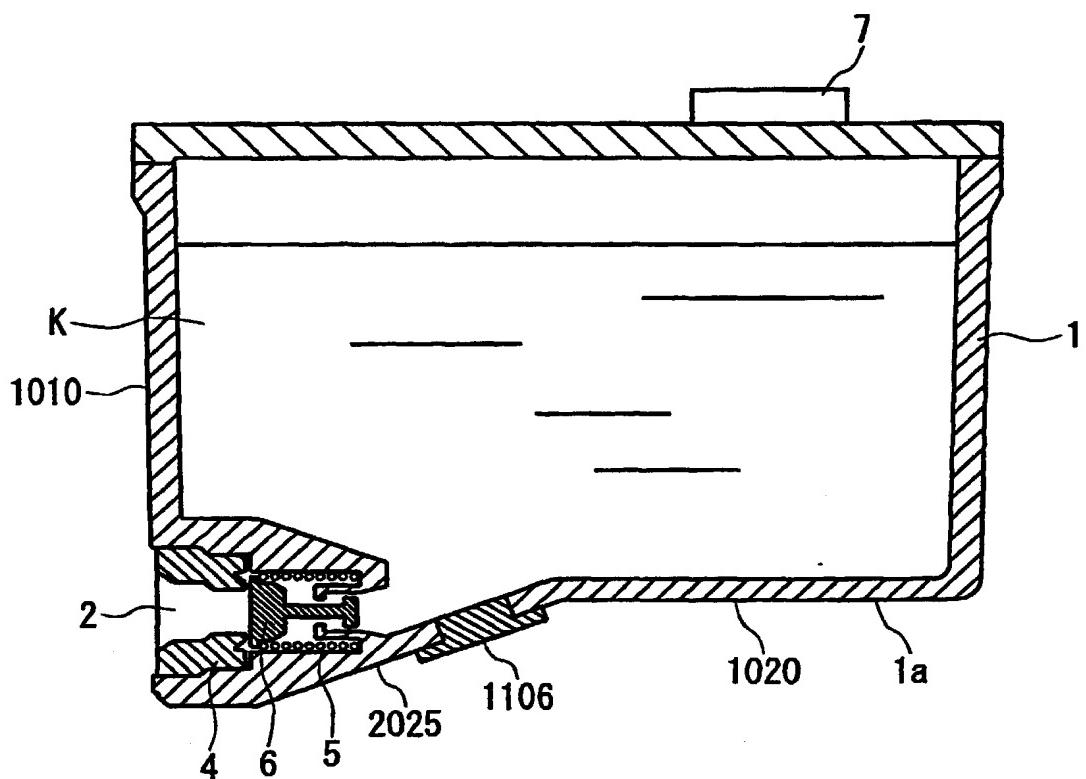


FIG. 3

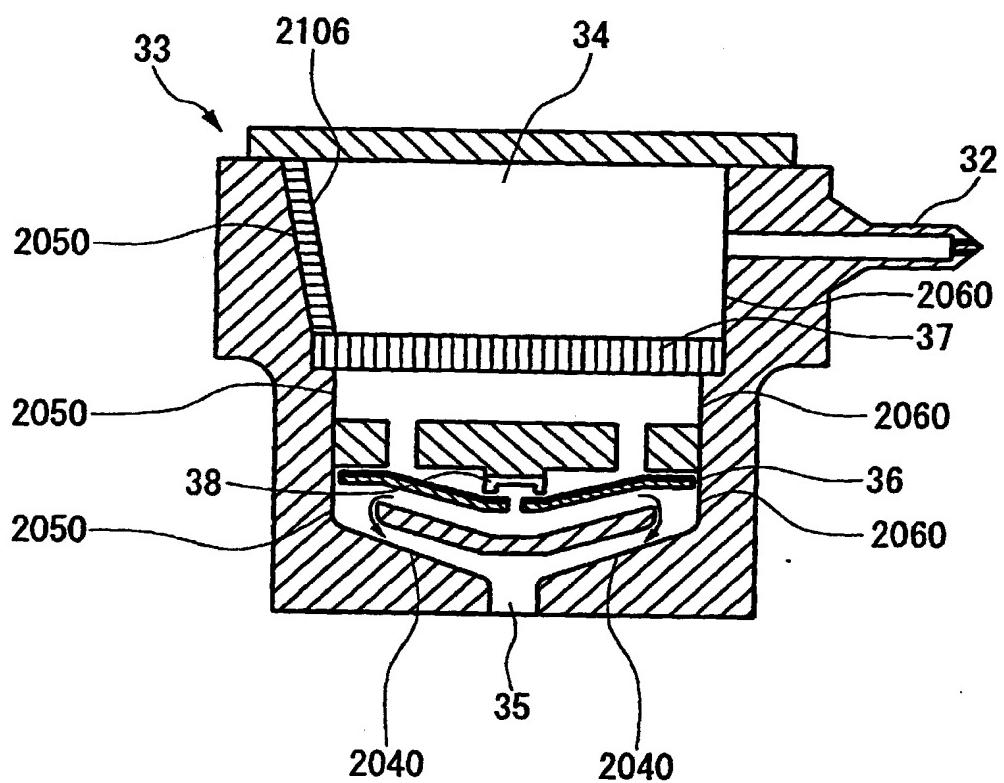


FIG. 74

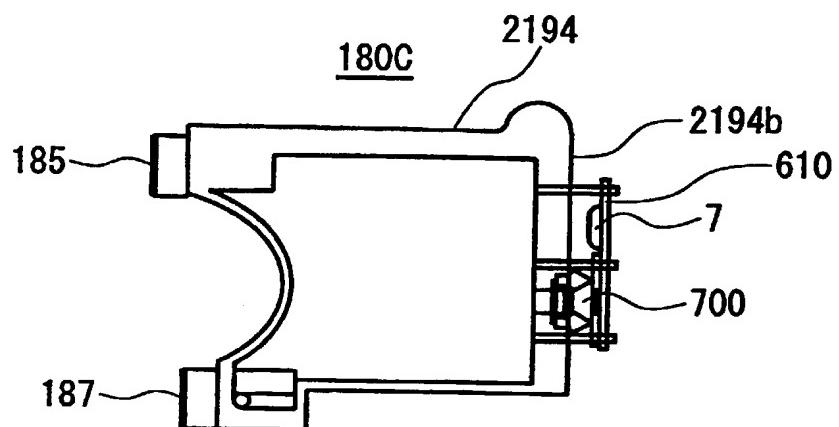


FIG. 75(A)

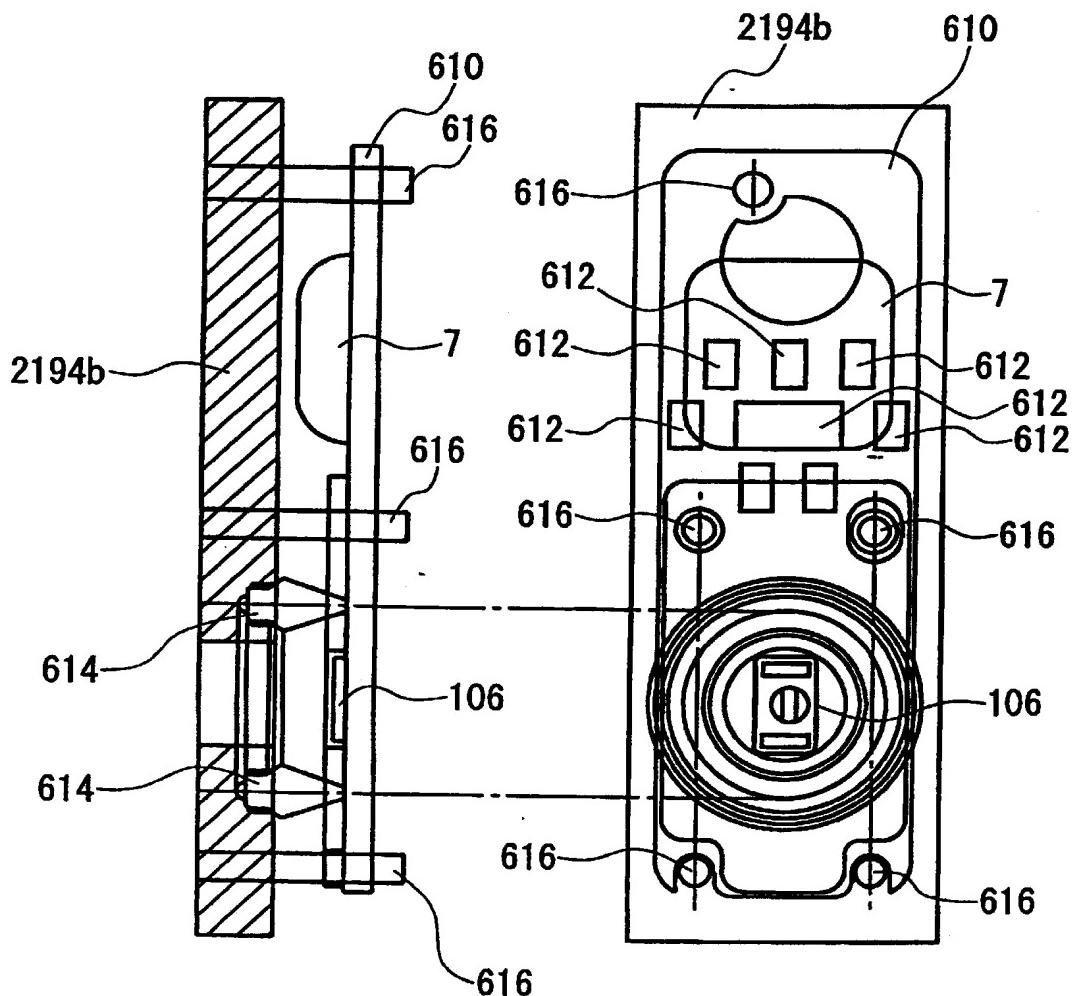


FIG. 75(B)

FIG. 75(C)

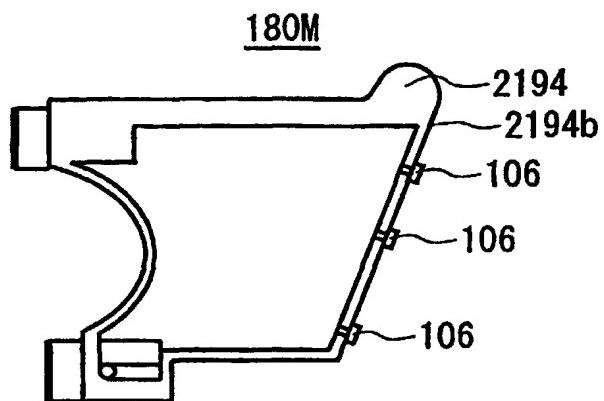


FIG. 76(A)

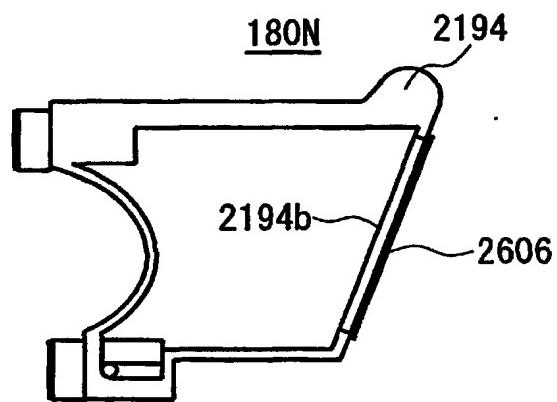


FIG. 76(B)

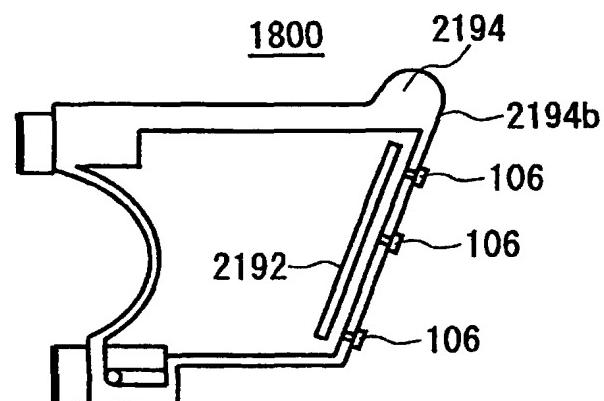


FIG. 76(C)

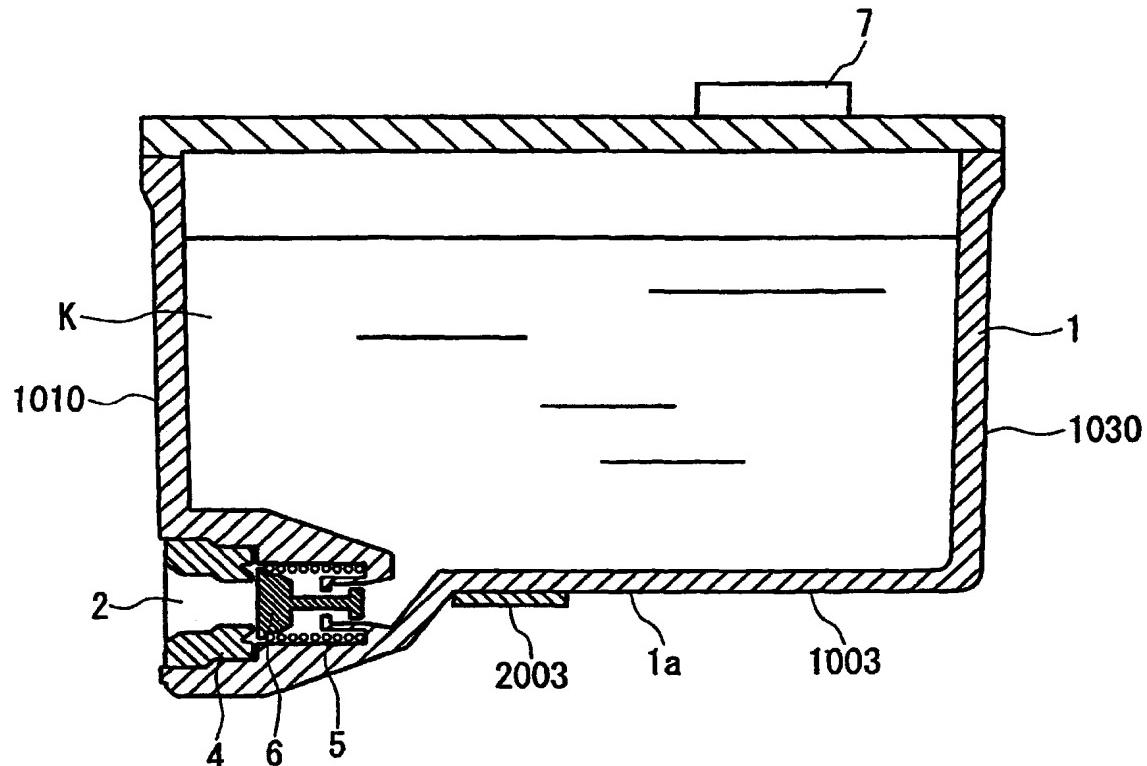


FIG. 77(A)

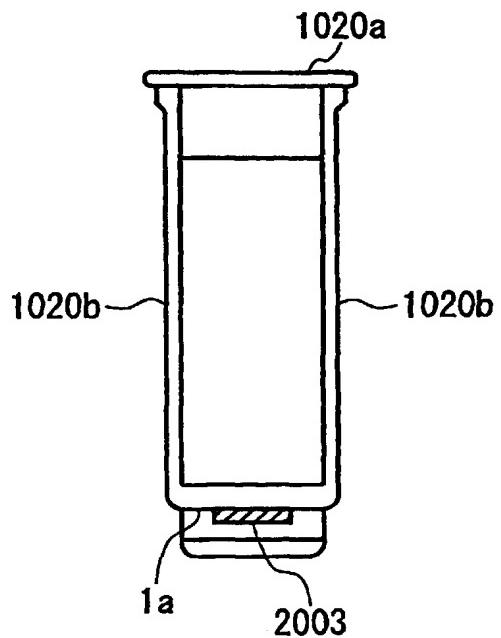


FIG. 77(B)

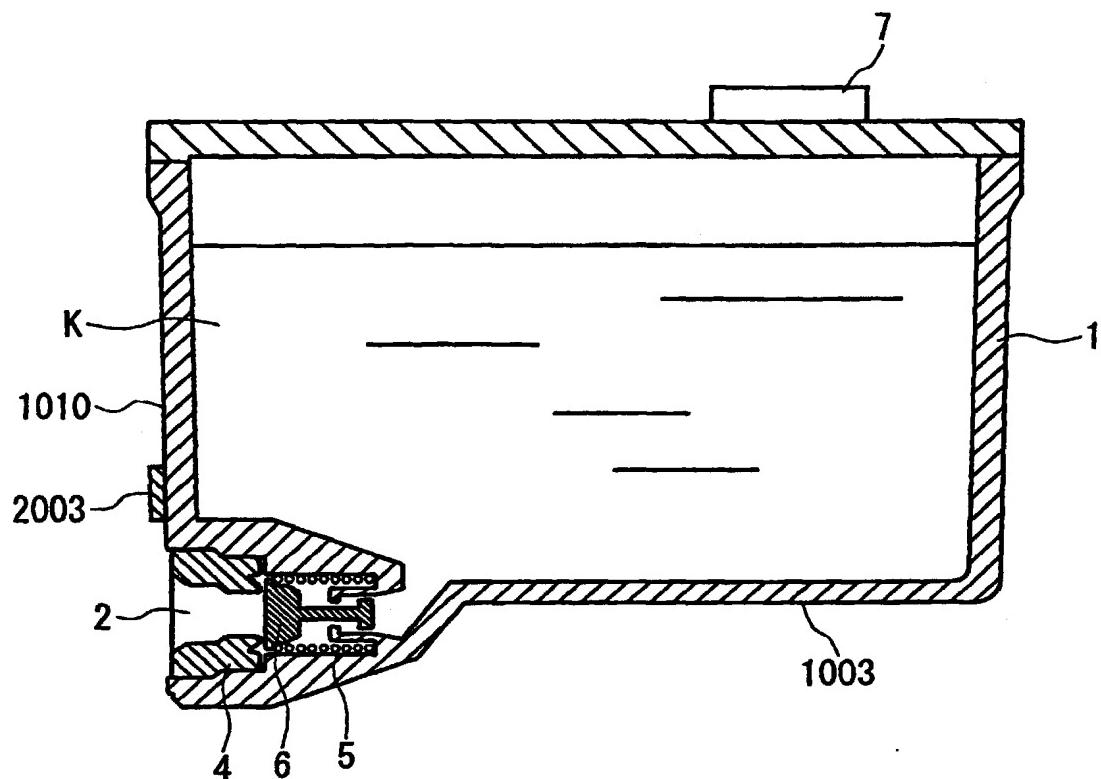


FIG. 78(A)

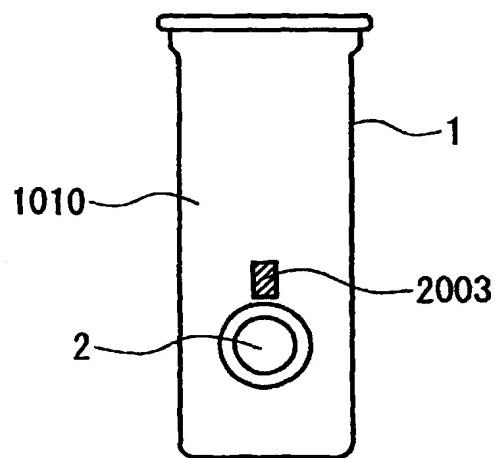


FIG. 78(B)

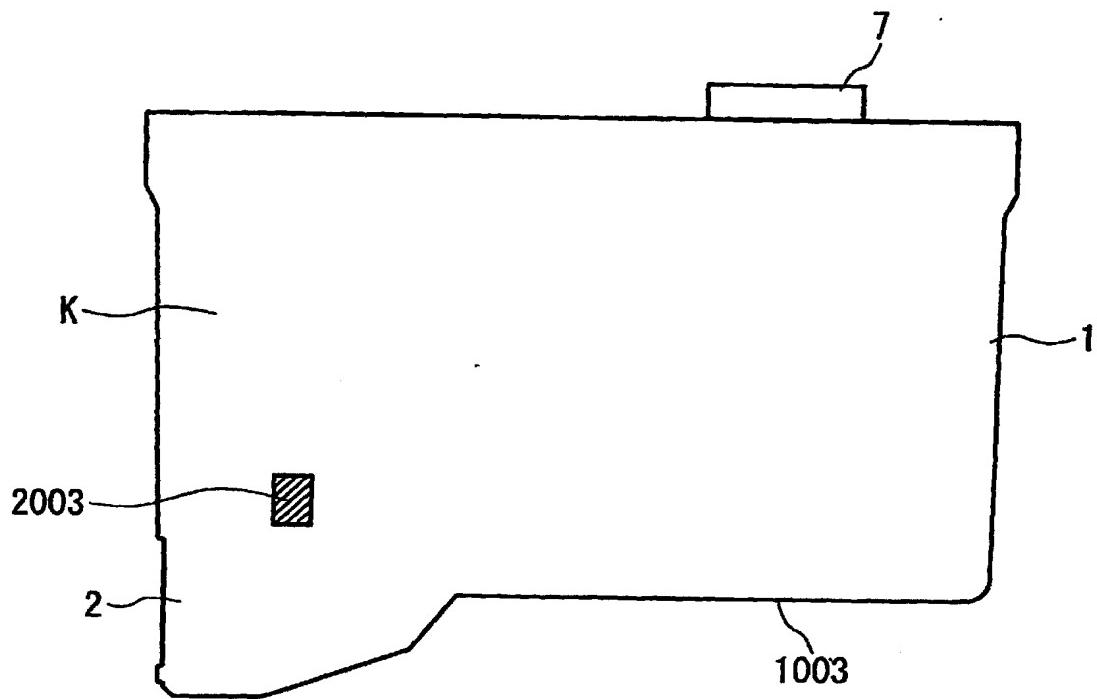


FIG. 79 (A)

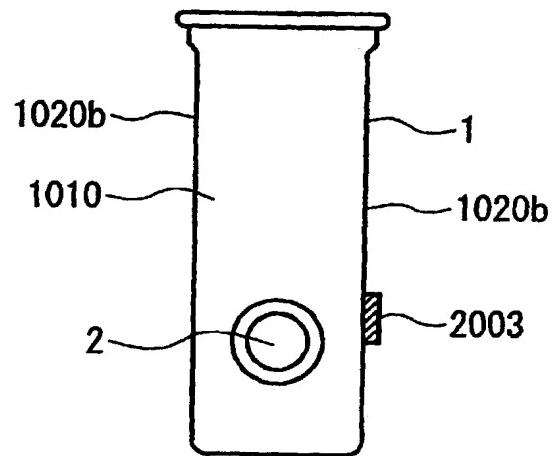


FIG. 79 (B)

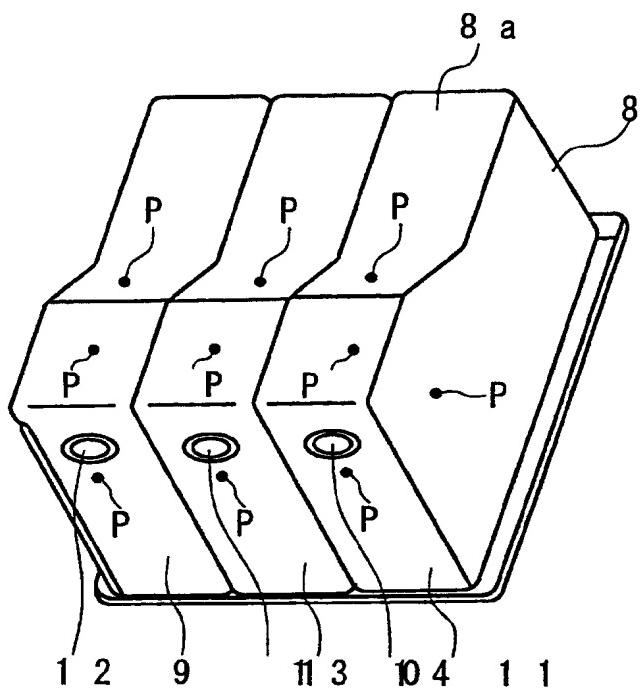


FIG. 80(A)

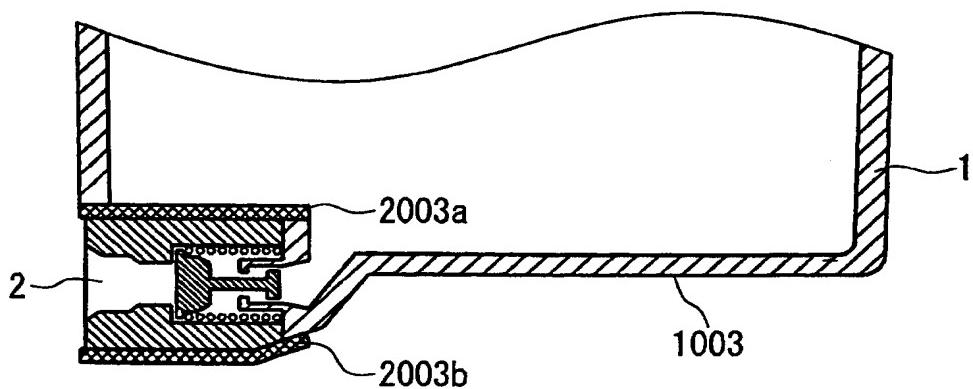


FIG. 80(B)

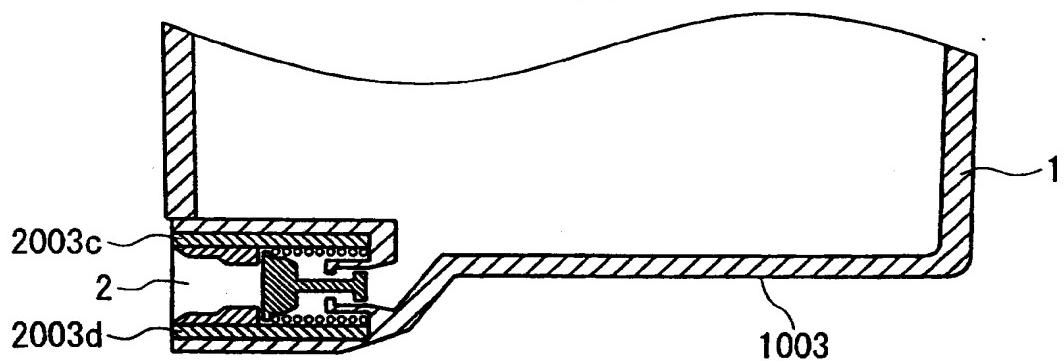


FIG. 80(C)

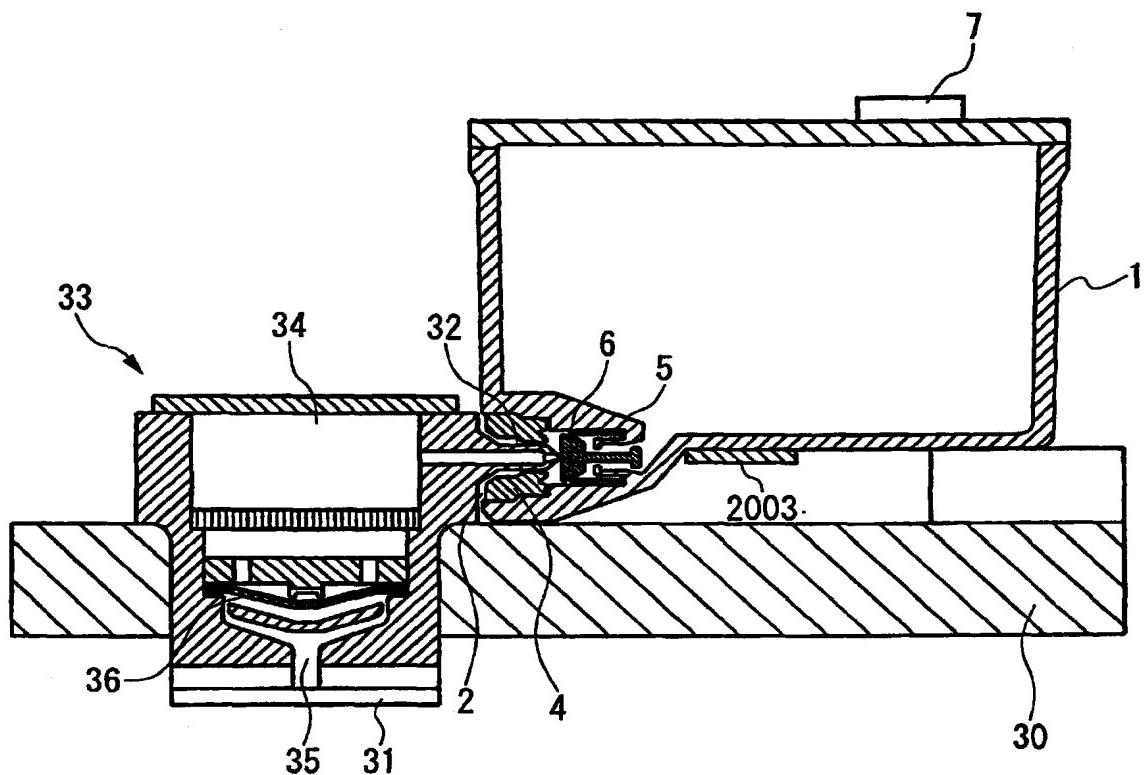
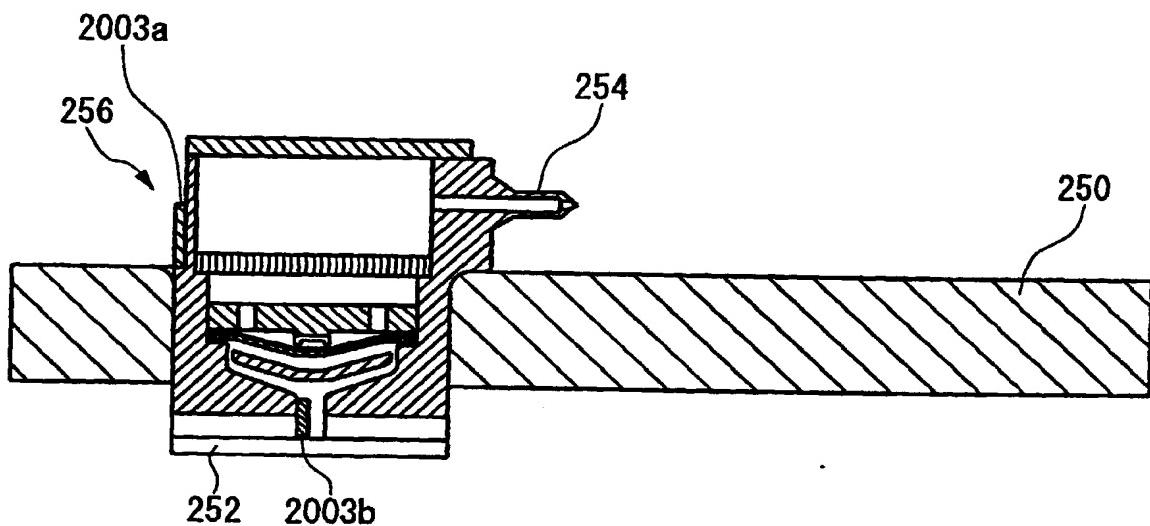
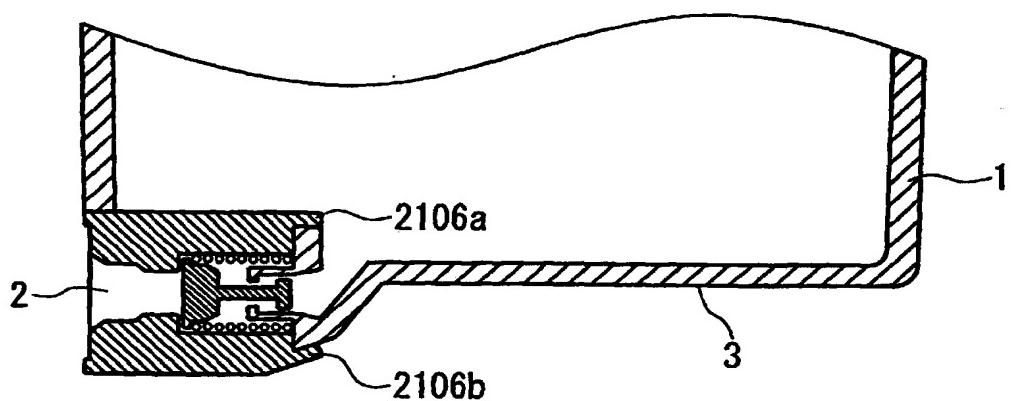


FIG. 81



F1 G8.2



F 1.68

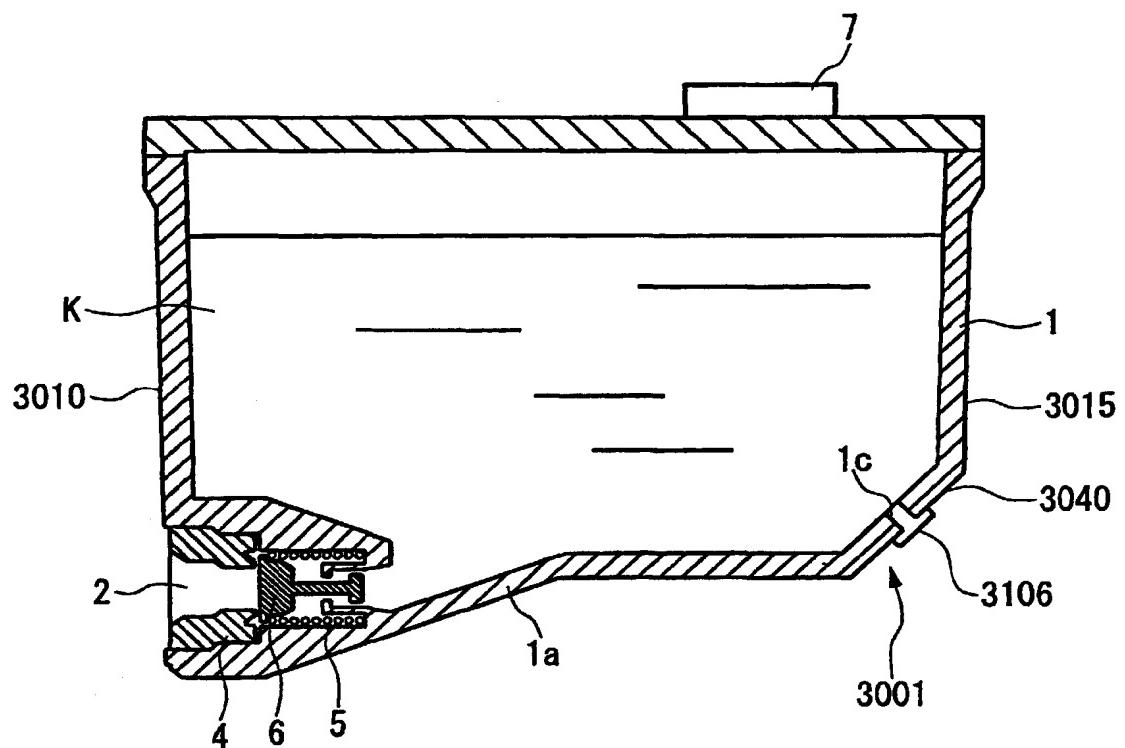


FIG. 84

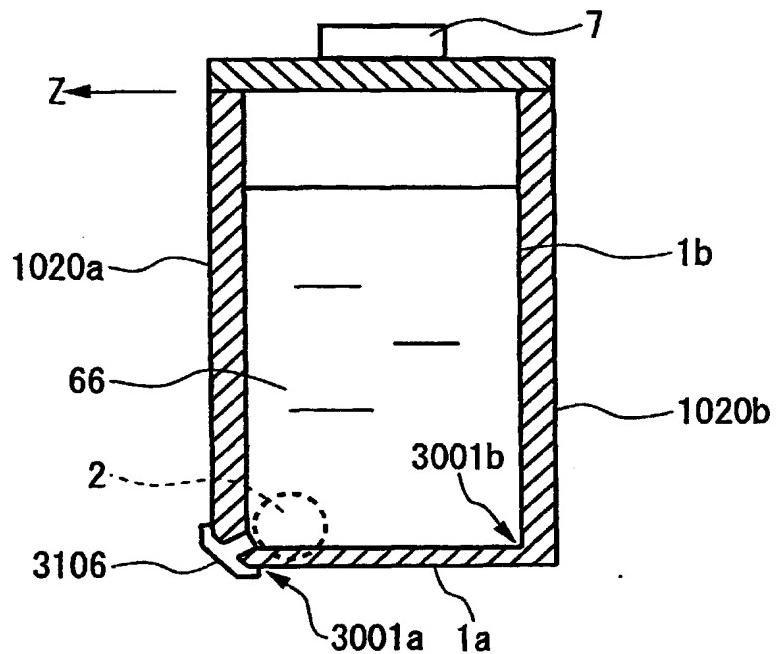
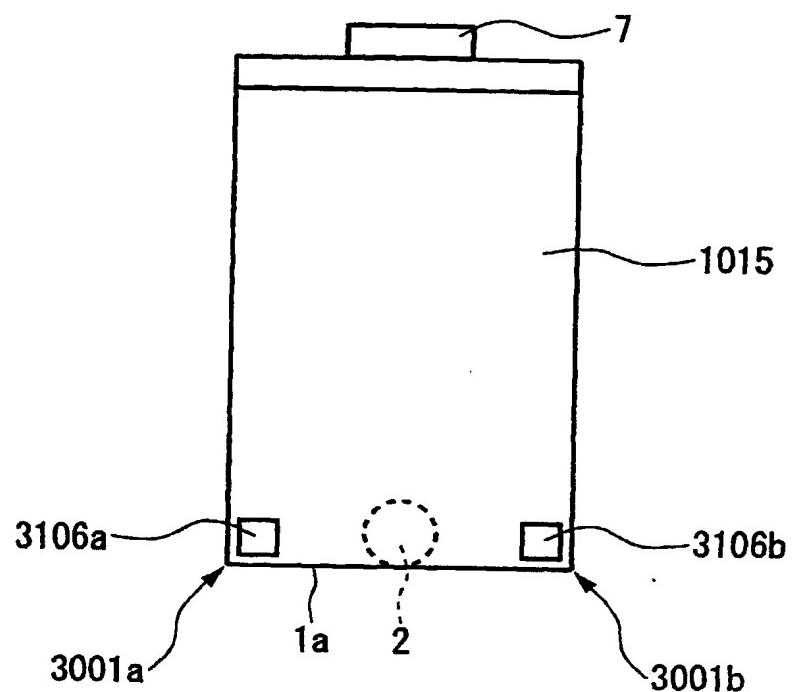


FIG 85



F 1. G8

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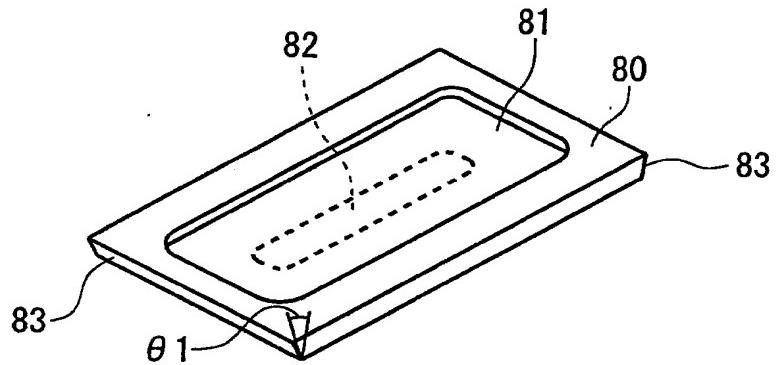


FIG. 87(A)

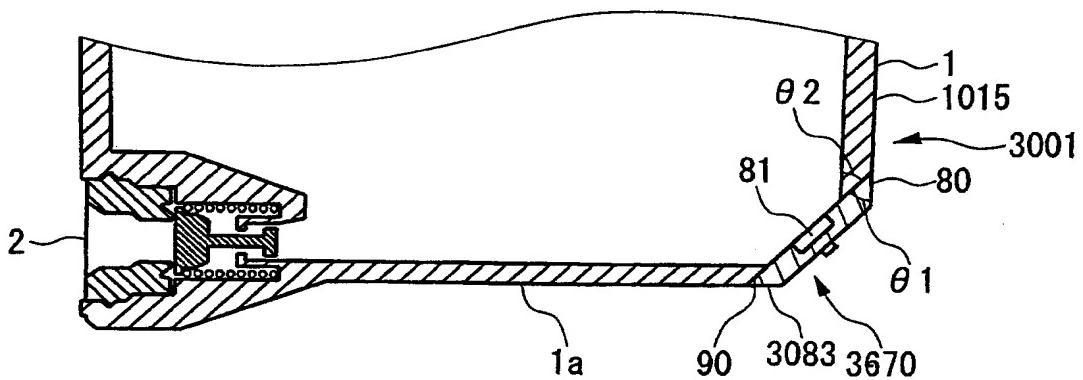


FIG. 87(B)

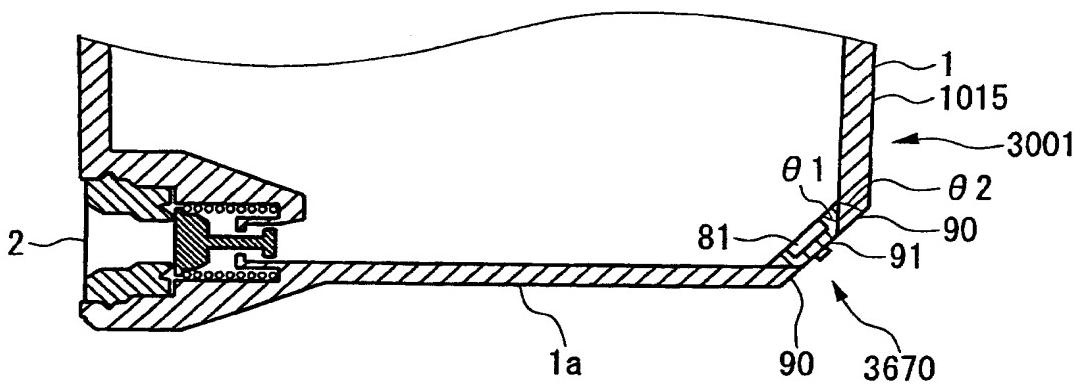
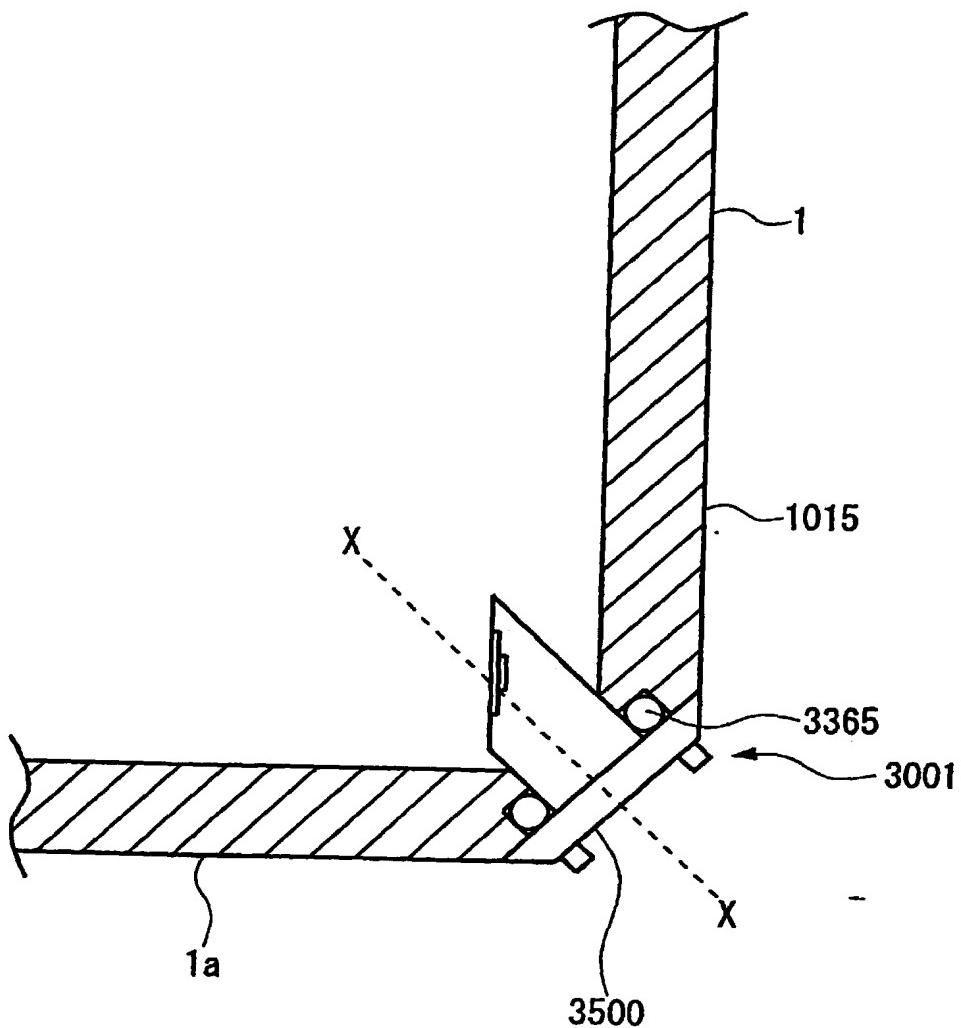


FIG. 87(C)



F 6 88



European Patent
Office

EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 00 11 0258

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim
X	GB 2 304 898 A (WHITAKER CORP) 26 March 1997 (1997-03-26) * page 3, line 8 - page 4, line 20 * * figure 1 *	1-6,9, 15,18, 19,21-23
Y		7,8,10, 12
A	---	24,28
Y	EP 0 676 624 A (SIMMONDS PRECISION PRODUCTS) 11 October 1995 (1995-10-11) * column 2, line 46 - column 4, line 18 * * column 4, line 43 - column 5, line 41 * * column 5, line 53 - column 6, line 24 * * figures 1-3 *	7,8,10, 12
X	US 5 793 705 A (GAZIS DENOS CONSTANTINOS ET AL) 11 August 1998 (1998-08-11) * abstract * * column 4, line 36 - column 5, line 46 * * column 7, line 11 - line 41 * * figures 1,4 *	1-6,10, 14,18, 19,21,22
A	---	24,28
X	US 4 770 038 A (ZUCKERWAR ALLAN J ET AL) 13 September 1988 (1988-09-13) * figure 1 * * column 2, line 46 - column 3, line 64 *	1-6,9, 15, 17-19, 21,22
A	---	24,28
A	US 5 774 136 A (MASON MARTIN K ET AL) 30 June 1998 (1998-06-30) * figures 3A,3B,5 * * column 5, line 51 - column 7, line 13 * * column 7, line 58 - column 8, line 35 *	1,24,28
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims		
Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner
THE HAGUE	26 September 2000	Papastefanou, E
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS		
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26-09-2000

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EP 0676624	A	11-10-1995	NONE	
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